

8.

GALATIANS 2:1-10

I. REJECT THOSE WHO TEACH YOU A DIFFERENT DOCTRINE

A. Because My Doctrine Is Not from Men

5. Later, after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas

Introduction

The fifth event Paul mentioned that confirmed he received his doctrine from God and not from men was a visit he made to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion. He said he went to Jerusalem on that occasion because God revealed to him he should go. He took Barnabas and Titus with him to confirm his testimony about the results he was having from preaching the Gospel to Gentiles.

In Galatians 2:1-19, Paul says that, when he got to Jerusalem, he presented his doctrine to three key leaders of the church. Those leaders were James, Cephas (Peter), and John, though others also were present. James was Jesus' half-brother and pastor of the church in Jerusalem. Cephas and John were two of Jesus' twelve apostles. Paul met with them in private because they were recognized as pillars in the church, and he wanted them to be aware of his understanding of the Gospel before he revealed it to the whole church. He wanted to confirm to them that he was not working in vain but was preaching the truth, as God had revealed it to Him. When he explained to James, Cephas, and John the Gospel he was preaching, he introduced Titus as evidence that Gentiles were responding to the Gospel. Titus was a young Greek who had not been circumcised but who had accepted Jesus and was assisting with the work in Antioch. When Paul introduced Titus, some intruders, who had come into the meeting uninvited, objected and said Titus could not be saved because he had not been circumcised. A debate resulted in which Saul and Barnabas did not yield an inch in holding to their convictions. In the end James, Cephas, and John agreed that Titus was a true believer and did not need to be circumcised. They also agreed that Saul and Barnabas were preaching the same doctrine they were preaching. They had nothing to add to Saul and Barnabas' doctrine. They only asked Paul and Barnabas to be sure they did not preach God's grace in such a way as to eliminate the importance of caring for the poor. Saul and Barnabas assured them they had that same concern and that they gladly accepted the advice. James, Cephas, and John shook hands with Saul, Barnabas, and Titus to show that they accepted that Saul and Barnabas were called to preach the Gospel to the nations (Gentiles), while James, Cephas, and John were called to preach the same Gospel to the Jews.

The confirmation that James, Cephas, and John gave to Saul and Barnabas added nothing to Saul's ministry and cannot be considered to be an official definition of a church doctrine. However, it had far-reaching influence in churches around the Empire and helped preserve the truth of the Gospel for the benefit of the Galatians and other Gentile believers. It continues to inform and influence Christianity around the world until today.

Paul explained his meeting with James, Cephas, and John as evidence that he did not get his doctrine from those church leaders. He showed that he actually informed James, Cephas, and John instead of their informing him and that they agreed that Saul and Barnabas already understood the Gospel the same way they did. However, some have misinterpreted what Saul wrote about the meeting and have understood the meeting to be some kind of General Church Council called to give official sanction to a true church doctrine. Actually, Paul told of his meeting with James, Cephas, and John to emphasize exactly the opposite. Instead, he informed and convinced them that he had received his doctrine from God. The support they gave to Paul not only confirmed the truth of the Gospel he preached but also demonstrated that Paul got his doctrine from God, not from even the greatest leaders of believers in Jesus in that day

Outline

- 5. Later, after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking along Titus also (2:1-10). 3-7**
- a. **And I went up according to a revelation (2:2a). 4**
- b. **And I laid out to them the Gospel that I proclaim among the nations (2:2b-2d). 4**
- (1) **But privately to the ones seeming [to be something] (2:2c). 4**
- (2) **Lest I might be running or had run in vain (2:2d). 4-5**
- c. **But Titus, who was with me and who was a Greek, was not even required to be circumcised (2:3-5), 5**
- (1) **In spite of some disguised false brothers (2:4) 5**
- (a) **Who disguised [themselves] to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus (2:4b). 5**
- (b) **That they might enslave us (2:4c). 5**
- (2) **To whom we did not yield in submission for even an hour, so that the truth of the Gospel could continue for you (2:5). 5**
- d. **But about the ones seeming to be something (2:6-10). 5-7**
- (1) **Of what sort they were makes no difference to me (2:6). 5-6**
- (a) **God does not pay attention to the face of men (2:6b). 6**
- (b) **For those seeming [to be something] added nothing to me (2:6c). . . 6**
- (2) **To the contrary (2:7-9a). 6**
- (a) **Seeing. 6**
- [1] **That I was entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcision, even as Peter to the circumcision (2:7b-9a). 6**
- [a] **Because the One working with Peter for the mission to the circumcision (2:8a). 6**
- [b] **Worked also with me for the nations (2:8b). 6**
- [2] **And knowing the grace given to me (2:9a). 6**
- (b) **James and Cephas and John, the ones seeming to be pillars (2:9b-10). 6-7**
- [1] **Gave to me and to Barnabas right [hands] of fellowship (2:9c). 6**
- [a] **That we [should go] to the uncircumcision**
- [b] **And they to the circumcision (2:9d). 6**
- [2] **Only [they asked] that we would remember the poor, which very thing I also was eager to do (2:10). 6-7**
- A Related Issue: Comparison with Acts 15:1-35. 7-11*
- A Second Related Issue: How long was Paul's ministry in Troas, Cilicia? 12-13*
- A Third Related Issue: What was the nature of the church conference in Acts 15 and what does it teach us about relationships among churches? 13-17*

Comments

Verses 1-2. **1 Later, after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking along Titus also, and I went up according to a revelation.**

2 And I laid out to them the Gospel that I proclaim among the nations, but privately to the ones seeming [to be important] lest I might be running or had run in vain

Later, after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again. The fifth event Paul cited as evidence that his doctrine came from God and not from men was another visit he made to Jerusalem during which he explained to James, Cephas, and John the Gospel he was proclaiming to the nations (Gentiles).

Paul said this trip to Jerusalem occurred “after fourteen years.” Since Paul described this trip immediately after telling of his visit to Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:18-21), it might be supposed that Paul meant fourteen years after he went to Syria and Cilicia; however, that conclusion does not appear to be valid for three reasons: (1) Paul’s reference to his ministry in Syria and Cilicia encompassed the entire time he was in those regions, not just to the time he began his ministry there. (2) The beginning of his ministry in Syria and Cilicia is only vaguely described in both Acts 9:30 and Galatians 1:21, and both are too indefinite to be used to date a period of time. (3) While Paul mentioned Syria and Cilicia together in one statement, his time in each place was distinct from the other. If he was counting the fourteen years from his ministry in Syria and Cilicia, it would be impossible to know to which place he was referring.

The only other event from which Paul could have measured the fourteen years was his conversion. It was the event that divided his life in half and that completely changed his direction. It was the date from which he measured all the events in his life. The only other event Paul mentions in Galatians by which he measures a period of time was his trip to Jerusalem to meet Cephas. Paul said he made that trip “after three years (Gal 1:18).” In that case, he definitely measured the three years from his conversion. When he mentions another

period of time just six verses later, he surely began measuring that event from the same point. Though 14 years could mean that the period occurred over 14 calendar years and could include only a portion of the first and last years, the most likely meaning is that the period was a full 168 months or very near to that length of time.

Paul’s point in referring to the length of time between his conversion and this visit to Jerusalem was to show that he had been preaching his Gospel for a long time before he went to Jerusalem and explained his doctrine to recognized Christian leaders.

with Barnabas. Paul specifically states that Barnabas went with him on this trip to Jerusalem. He and Barnabas began to work together in Antioch and then God sent them out together on the first deliberate missionary adventure in Christian history (Acts 13:1-3). So we can understand that this trip was after Barnabas and Paul began to work together. Most likely it was after the mission trip they made together. The implication is that they went together to Jerusalem so they could support each other in testifying that their mission to the Gentiles was of God.

taking with [us] Titus also. Paul noted that he and Barnabas took Titus with them also. This verse is the first reference to Titus in the New Testament, and he is not mentioned at all in the book of Acts. Neither this passage nor any other passage in the New Testament tells when or how Paul met Titus or whether Paul was the one who led Titus to faith in Jesus. Titus could have been converted while Paul and Barnabas were on the first missionary journey and returned to Antioch with them. Or he could have been converted in Antioch while Paul and Barnabas were on their journey and could have become a co-worker with Paul and Barnabas when they returned. These matters were not what was important to Paul when he wrote this letter to the Galatian churches. What was important was that Titus was evidence of the power of the Gospel to save Gentiles.

Later Titus became a trusted helper to Paul, which is revealed in that Paul mentioned him nine other times in three of his letters (1 Cor. 2:13;

7:6,13,14; 8:6,16,23; 12:18; 2 Tim. 4). In those references, Paul mentioned some important and difficult missions he sent Titus to perform, revealing the great confidence Paul had in him. In addition, Paul wrote a letter to Titus which has become one of the books of the Bible. That letter reveals that Paul left Titus in Crete to serve as pastor of the church there in a difficult time (Titus 1:5). Paul's letter to Titus was to advise him concerning the work Paul had left in his hands in Crete.

When Titus accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their trip to Jerusalem, Titus was a young man and a new convert. It is evident from what Paul says about Titus in this passage that he was a Greek and that he had not been circumcised. Paul and Barnabas must have taken him to Jerusalem with them to serve as evidence of the validity of their ministry to the Gentiles and of the truthfulness of their doctrine. Titus was living proof that Jesus saves people by grace through faith without circumcision and that salvation is available to Gentiles on the same basis as Jews.

and I went up according to a revelation. Paul did not make this trip to Jerusalem because he felt uncertain about his message or because he needed approval from the Jerusalem leaders to give him authority for what he was doing. He went to Jerusalem to confer with the church there because God revealed to him that he should go. God sent him for the sake of the church in Jerusalem and of the church in Antioch, rather than for his own sake.

And I laid out to them the Gospel that I proclaim among the nations. Paul did not go to Jerusalem to ask the leaders there to teach him correct doctrine. He went to explain his doctrine to them and to show them that it came from God. Paul had been preaching his doctrine to the Gentiles for fourteen years by that time. He wanted the Christians in Jerusalem to be aware of what he was accomplishing and to know that God was in it.

but privately to the ones seeming [to be important] Paul presented his doctrine to the ones who seemed to be the chief leaders of the church in Jerusalem. He called them "the ones seeming." In the translation above, the words "to be important"

are added to enable the statement to make sense in English; however, those words do not occur in the Greek text. In verse 6, he added the words "to be something," and in verse 9 he added the words "to be pillars"; but in this his first mention of them he only called them "the ones seeming." Paul did so to indicate that whatever they seemed to be was not impressive to him. He considered that whatever they seemed to be was illusory. Paul's words show that in God's kingdom, no human person is a divinely appointed authority. God Himself is King. Everyone else is a servant. Paul knew that the truth he preached was true because God had given it to him. He did not need for it to be authenticated by any human authority.

Paul did not name the respected leaders to whom he spoke until verse 9. In that verse he says they were James, Cephas (Peter), and John. They were among the most prominent leaders in the young Christian movement. James was a half-brother of Jesus and the pastor of the Jerusalem church. "Cephas" was the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name "Peter" (see comments on Gal. 1:18-20 in Volume 6, page 1, under the heading "to become acquainted with Cephas"). Most ancient manuscripts use the name "Cephas" in verse 9, but some use the name "Peter." Cephas was one of Jesus' original twelve apostles. John was another of Jesus' twelve apostles. At that time, the apostles were still staying close to Jerusalem at all costs, because they were determined to keep the faith alive in Jerusalem, the place where Jesus died for the sins of the world (Acts 8:1). The place to consult with the apostles was Jerusalem.

lest I might be running or had run in vain. This statement has been taken to mean that, if Paul did not get the approval of the recognized leaders in Jerusalem, he would not have had proof that his doctrine was true. That view cannot be what Paul meant, because the whole point of this long section of Galatians was that his doctrine was authenticated by God, not men. However, Paul knew that, no matter how true his doctrine was, if the Jerusalem church did not agree that it was true, a serious division would take place in the young Christian movement that likely would destroy it. Then all the work he had done would come to nothing. Paul went to Jerusalem because he knew that, if the

growing division in the young Christian movement was not stopped, it could destroy all the work he had done and he would have run in vain. He wanted to avoid that possibility at all costs.

Verses 3-4. **3 But Titus, who was with me and who was a Greek, was not even required to be circumcised**

4 In spite of some disguised false brothers who disguised [themselves] to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus that they might enslave us,

But Titus, who was with me and who was a Greek, was not even required to be circumcised. When Paul and Barnabas presented their doctrine to the Jerusalem leaders, Titus was with them and undoubtedly was used by them as evidence that Gentiles could be saved and could make powerful Christian witnesses without being circumcised and without practicing the Jewish ritual law. After Paul's presentation, those leaders did not insist that Titus be circumcised. They accepted Titus as a genuine Christian without his being circumcised. They accepted that he was saved by God's grace, and God's grace was sufficient for his salvation without practicing the Jewish law. That event had great importance for Paul. It meant that he and the Jerusalem leaders were in agreement with his position on salvation by grace through faith and that a potential division in the young Christian movement was avoided.

In spite of some disguised false brothers who disguised [themselves] to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus that they might enslave us. The agreement of the Jerusalem leaders was especially significant to Paul because it was done in the face of outspoken and determined opposition. Some who were insisting that keeping the Jewish ceremonial law was necessary for salvation came into Paul's meeting with the leaders under false pretenses. They did not come to hear Paul and Barnabas with open minds but to gain information to use against Paul and Barnabas. To Paul the teaching of those men was equivalent to enslaving those who accepted it. He had once been enslaved to the law, and he would not be returned to it.

Verse 5. **To whom we did not yield in submission for even an hour, so that the truth of the Gospel could continue for you.**

In verse 2, Paul used only the pronoun "I" when he told of how he explained to the church leaders the Gospel he preached. However, in this verse when he speaks of resistance to those who opposed his presentation, he uses the pronoun "we." The change of pronouns indicates that at this point Barnabas became actively involved in responding to the critics. Paul says he and Barnabas did not submit to the arguments of the pretenders for one hour. In fact, they resisted their arguments strenuously. Paul and Barnabas were strong in the position they took, not so much for their own sakes as for the sake of the Galatians and other Gentile believers. They knew that preserving their doctrine was vital if the truth of Jesus was to continue to be proclaimed to Gentiles around the world.

Verse 6. **But about the ones seeming to be something, of what sort they were makes no difference to me. God does not pay attention to the face of men. For those seeming [to be important] added nothing to me.**

But about the ones seeming to be something, Paul explained that his meeting with the leaders in Jerusalem was not because he needed their approval to preach or to confirm that he was preaching the truth. In verse 2, he called them "the ones seeming," in other words, whatever they appeared to be was superficial. In verse 6, he called them "the ones seeming to be something," and in verse 9 he called them "the ones seeming to be pillars." Paul spoke to them because he respected their positions of leadership, but he did not believe their positions made them more important than others or gave them special access to God or special authority from God. In this verse, he said those who seemed to be something made no difference to him. What they appeared to be outwardly was not what was important to him. He used a word that describes diversity or differences.

of what sort they were makes no difference to me. Paul said their positions and their outward appearance did not make a difference to him or change his opinions. He had his message from

God, and that support was all he needed. Whatever position or recognition some leaders had among the Christians was not important to Paul. The commission of God, not the approval of men, was what was important to him.

God does not pay attention to the face of men. Paul insisted that he was in agreement with God when he refused to let the appearance of men or the positions they held influence him. He said God does not pay attention to men's faces. In other words, God does not see what men appear to be on the outside. He knows and pays attention to what is in people's hearts. God does not show favoritism. He treats everyone alike. He speaks to everyone and reveals His truth to everyone who will listen. He does not parcel it out only to a selected few. In like manner, He does not exalt one worker or witness above another. He gives equal honor to all, according to their faithfulness in service.

For the ones seeming to be something added nothing to me. Though Paul met with the respected leaders in Jerusalem for the sake of the truth and for the sake of Gentile believers, those leaders added nothing to his understanding of God or to his understanding of the Gospel. They certainly did not impart to him the authority or right to preach the Gospel. God had given him the truth and the authority to preach it. Respected leaders could add nothing to what God had already done. Paul was not being arrogant. He was being insistent on the truth God had given him. His meeting with James, Peter, and John had given vital information to the Jerusalem leaders, but it had added nothing to Paul's understanding of the Gospel or to the ministry God had given him.

Verses 7-9a. **7 To the contrary, seeing that I was entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcision, even as Peter to the circumcision**

8 Because the One working with Peter for the mission to the circumcision worked also with me for the nations

9a And knowing the grace given to me

Instead of Paul's being taught by the recognized Christian leaders in Jerusalem, they were taught by Paul. They came to see three great

truths: (1) Paul was trusted with carrying the Gospel to the Gentiles just as Peter was trusted with carrying the Gospel to the Jews. They were called to preach the same Gospel to different target groups. (2) The same God who worked in Peter to send him to the Jews worked in Paul to send him to the Gentiles. (3) God's grace had been given to Paul to lead and empower him to do the work to which God had called him.

Though Paul did not base what he believed on what important people said, he was glad to speak to people like James, Cephas, and John who were considered to be important leaders to share with them what God had revealed to him. When he explained what he preached to James, Cephas, and John, they recognized that what he preached was of God. It came from the same God whom they knew and worshiped. The same God who had appointed Peter to lead out in witnessing to the Jews had appointed Paul and Barnabas to lead out in giving witness to the same message to Gentiles. Paul received his Gospel and his commission to preach it from the grace of God, just like they had received their commission to preach it to the Jews from the grace of God.

Verses 9b. **9b James and Cephas and John, the ones respected to be pillars gave to me and to Barnabas right [hands] of fellowship that we [should go] to the uncircumcision and they to the circumcision**

As a result of Paul's explanations to James, Cephas, and John, they shook right hands with Paul and Barnabas to confirm that they had received their doctrine from God and had been called to minister to the Gentiles as surely as they had been called to minister to the Jews. Their agreement with Paul's message did not authenticate Paul's doctrine. It recognized that God already had authenticated it by revealing it to him.

Verse 10. **Only that we might remember the poor, which very thing I also was eager to.**

James, Cephas, and John did urge Paul not to neglect ministry to social needs of people while he was emphasizing spiritual salvation by grace through faith. They mentioned specifically meeting

the needs of the poor. Paul assured them he already was eager to do as they recommended. Even in those early days of Christianity, Christian leaders recognized that attention to the spiritual needs of people did not exempt them from giving attention to people's social and material needs. Ministry to the

needy was a big emphasis in the Jerusalem church (Acts 6:1-7), and James, Cephas, and John did not want it to be neglected in the newer churches. Paul agreed and assured them that he was eager to fulfill that obligation as they suggested.

A RELATED ISSUE
COMPARISON WITH ACTS 15:1-35

In Galatians, after briefly stating that he spent time in Syria and Cilicia (Gal. 1:21-24), Paul skipped to an event that occurred "after 14 years" (Gal. 2:1). If we had no more to go on than Paul's statements in Galatians, we might conclude that he spent the rest of the 14 years he mentioned in Galatians 2:1 ministering in Cilicia. However, comparison with Acts 11:25-14:28 reveals that Paul was occupied with a great variety of activities during those years. Both Galatians 2:1 and Acts 15:1 tell of a trip Paul made to Jerusalem. The question that is debated among Bible students is, was the trip to trip described in Galatians 2:1-10 the same as the trip to Jerusalem described in Acts 15:1-35? In considering how Acts 15 compares with Paul's statements in Galatians, it is helpful to compare the events of those 14 years as they are described in Galatians and in Acts and then compare the trips to Jerusalem that the two passages describe.

Paul's activities during the 14 years he mentioned in Galatians 2:1. *Comments on Galatians 2:1 above show that the 14 year period began with Paul's conversion. Listed below are the events he described in Galatians 1:11-2:1 between his conversion and the trip to Jerusalem he described in Galatians 2:1-10. Those events were described in Volumes 7, page 3, of this commentary. The list below also shows the estimated amount of time occupied by each event:*

<i>Study in Arabia and ministry in Damascus</i>	<i>Gal.1:15-17; Acts 9:19b-24</i>	<i>3 years</i>
<i>Trip from Damascus to Jerusalem</i>	<i>Gal. 1:18; Acts 9:26a</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>
<i>Visit in Jerusalem to meet Cephas</i>	<i>Gal. 1:18-20; Acts 9:27a-30</i>	<i>1 month to 4 months</i>
<i>Trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea, Syria</i>	<i>Gal. 1:21; Acts 9:30</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>
<i>Ministry in Caesarea</i>	<i>Gal.1:22-24; Acts 9:30</i>	<i>1 month to 1½ months</i>
<i>Trip to Tarsus, Cilicia</i>	<i>Gal. 1:21; Acts 9:30</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>

After Paul went to Tarsus, the Book of Acts turns its attention to others who spread the Gospel across ethnic barriers. Acts 10:1-11:18 tells of Peter's witness to Cornelius and other Gentiles in Caesarea. Acts 11:19-24 tells that believers from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and founded a church there that soon became the strongest Gentile church to date. Those verses relate that the church in Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch to investigate the work there and that he remained to encourage and instruct them (vs. 21-22). The work was growing so fast additional leaders were needed, so Barnabas went to seek for Paul. He found him in Tarsus, right where the Book of Acts last located him (v. 23-25; compare Acts 9:30). Nothing in the record tells how long Paul worked in Tarsus before Barnabas came to seek for him. Barnabas persuaded Paul to go with him to Antioch to help with the growing work there, and they worked together there for a whole year (v. 26). Acts then continues to follow Paul's further activities in spreading the Gospel to Gentiles. Those activities are summarized below, along with the estimated amount of time occupied by each.

<i>First ministry in Antioch</i>	<i>Acts. 11:25-26</i>	<i>1 year</i>
<i>Trip to Jerusalem for famine relief</i>	<i>Acts 11:27-12:24</i>	<i>1½ years to 2 years</i>
<i>Resumption of first ministry in Antioch</i>	<i>Acts 12:25</i>	<i>3 months</i>
<i>First missionary journey, with Barnabas</i>	<i>Acts. 13:1-14:26</i>	<i>1½ years to 2½ years</i>
<i>Second ministry in Antioch</i>	<i>Acts 14:27-28</i>	<i>9 months to 1 year</i>

Those events were important parts of Paul's life and ministry. They are deserving of careful study, but that study needs to be undertaken in connection with the Book of Acts. Comments on those events will not be made in this commentary, because Paul did not mention them in his letter to the Galatians. He did not mention them to the Galatians because he was not giving them a report on his whole life or even on his whole ministry. His failure to mention those events does not indicate that those events did not happen. Neither does it indicate that Paul wanted to hide those events from the Galatians. They simply did not fit into the emphasis he was making. He had no need to waste words by telling of those events when they did not apply to the emphasis he was sharing with the Galatians. He stuck to his subject, which was citing evidences that he did not get his doctrine from men. Thus, he proceeded by describing the next event that proved his point, which was a trip to Jerusalem he and Barnabas made to discuss the question of circumcision with the church there (Gal. 2:1-10).

Paul's description of that trip to Jerusalem is brief and aimed only at illustrating the one point he had in mind. It raises the question of whether that trip was the same one that is described in much fuller detail in Acts 15:1-35. The two passages are so different that interpreters have arrived at distinctly contradictory conclusions concerning them. In order to consider the various views, it is necessary to summarize the events as they are described in Acts 15.

Paul and Barnabas's trip to Jerusalem as described in Acts 15. Acts 15 describes the circumstances of Paul and Barnabas's trip to Jerusalem as follows:

(1) *Some members of the church in Jerusalem came to Antioch and insisted that to be saved a person had to be circumcised according to the laws of Moses (Acts 15:1).*

(2) *Paul and Barnabas strongly disputed with them, and a debate resulted that was so intense the church in Antioch decided to send representatives, who included Paul and Barnabas, to Jerusalem to discuss the controversy with the church there. They needed to know if the men who had come from Jerusalem accurately represented what the Jerusalem church believed and taught. They also wanted advice from the Jerusalem church to help them decide what position they should take (Acts 15:2).*

(3) *En route to Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas reported to churches in Phoenicia and Samaria on their missionary journey and on the conversion of Gentiles. The brothers in those churches greatly rejoiced over the good news (Acts 15:3).*

(4) *In Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas gave the same report; but it was not as well received there. Some Pharisees who were members of the church spoke up and insisted that it was necessary for the Gentiles to be circumcised and to observe the ceremonial laws of Moses. After heated discussion arose, the church referred the matter to the apostles and elders of the church (Acts 15:4-5).*

(5) *When the apostles and elders met to discuss the issue, much debate took place. Then Peter told how in the early days after Jesus' ascension into heaven, God chose him to present the Gospel to some Gentiles who believed and to whom God gave the Holy Spirit just as He had given the Holy Spirit to Jews from around the Empire on the Day of Pentecost. Peter concluded that, since God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles in giving the gift of the Holy Spirit, they should not put on the Gentiles a yoke that neither they nor their fathers had been able to bear. Instead, they should recognize that Jews are saved by grace through faith just as the Gentiles are. The whole group grew silent, and Paul and Barnabas told of the miraculous events that had occurred among the Gentiles during their journey. Then James arose and quoted from Amos's and Isaiah's prophecies, in which God promised "to raise up the fallen tent of David so that Gentiles who are called by God's name might find the Lord." He suggested, therefore, that they send a letter to the church in Antioch that they should not cause difficulty to Gentiles who turned to the Lord but only ask*

that they abstain from eating offerings made to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating animals that were strangled, and from eating blood (Acts 15:6-21). The other apostles and elders agreed with James' recommendation (Acts 15:6-21).

(6) The decision of the apostles and elders was reported to the church, and the church decided to send representative to Antioch to tell of their decision and to send with those representatives a letter containing the conclusions James had suggested (Acts 15:22-29).

Three views of how Galatians 2:1-10 and Acts 15:1-35 relate to each other. Anyone who reads Galatians 2:1-10 and compares that passage with Acts 15 can easily see that circumcision was the issue that was debated in both passages and that the same conclusions were reached in both passages, but the circumstances of the meetings that are related in the two passages are distinctly different. Those differences are the reason that varying views have been suggested concerning how the two passages relate to each other. Basically three different views have been suggested.

(1) One view is that the account given in Acts is inaccurate. Some critical commentators always find only one solution for every seeming discrepancy. They assume that one or the other of the accounts has to be inaccurate or imaginary. There has been no shortage of commentators taking that position with regard to these passages. The majority of those who conclude that the Acts account and the Galatians account both cannot be correct insist that the Acts account has to be flawed. They say that, if a Conference of apostles and elders had concluded that circumcision was not necessary for salvation, Paul definitely would have mentioned it to the Galatians. They insist it would have been too strong a confirmation of Paul's position for him to fail to tell of it in his letter to the churches in Galatia. Therefore, they propose that no such church meetings as are described in Acts 15 took place.

Proponents of this view have to insist that the Book of Acts was written many years after the events occurred. They say that if Acts had been written soon after the supposed dispute over circumcision took place, so many people would have been alive to testify that the account was in error that it could not have survived. So the critical interpreters not only conclude that the account in Acts 15 is incorrect but also that the date and authorship of Acts that the Book itself suggests is a hoax.

The accuracy of the Book of Acts has been studied in great detail by many scholars, and strong agreement now exists that so many events described in the Book of Acts can be confirmed by external evidence that the writer of Acts must be considered to be a very accurate historian. Few today hold to the view that the Book of Acts and the account in Acts 15 are unreliable. The contention that the Book of Acts is a late spurious writing that is full of errors and misstatements is largely abandoned today.

(2) A second view is that the trip to Jerusalem described in Acts 5 is a different trip from the one Paul referred to in Galatians 2:1-10. They proposed that Saul and Barnabas made two trips to Jerusalem to discuss circumcision. Though this view provides a seemingly easy solution to the problem, it has little evidence to support it and much evidence to refute it. It would have been extremely strange for Saul to make two trips to Jerusalem from the same location accompanied by the same people to discuss the same issue with the same group in order to reach the same conclusion. Many have pointed out that it is harder to explain how essentially the same events could have occurred twice than to explain the seeming inconsistencies between the two Biblical accounts. The claim that the seeming contradictions can be explained by supposing two trips of Paul to Jerusalem is not a satisfactory conclusion. It creates more problems than it solves.

(3) A third view is that Acts 15 and Galatians 2:1-10 describe four different meetings of the Jerusalem church that occurred on the same trip to Jerusalem. The four different meetings are explained as follows:

(a) *Since Paul and Barnabas had gone to Jerusalem to seek counsel on an issue that caused serious dispute in Antioch, they met first with James, Cephas, and John to explain the reason for their trip before making a report to the whole church (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15:4a).*

(b) *After receiving approval from James, Cephas, and John to speak to the church, they reported to the whole church the results of their missionary journey and emphasized the conversion of Gentiles. Some expressed strong opposition to Paul and Barnabas's report and insisted that circumcision and keeping the Mosaic law was necessary for salvation. As a result, the matter was referred to the apostles and prophets in the church for discussion and preparation of a recommendation to the whole church (Acts 15:4b-6).*

(c) *The apostles and elders met to recommend a solution. After much discussion, they agreed to recommend that the church recognize that salvation for Jews and Gentiles alike is by grace through faith without the necessity of keeping the Mosaic law (Acts 15:6-21).*

(d) *The church met to receive the recommendation of the apostles and prophets, and they gladly accepted their recommendation (Acts 15:22-29).*

These suggestions provide a reasonable explanation of how all the events in both passages can be accepted without doing violence to either passage. It is extremely plausible and likely that Paul would have had a private discussion with the church leadership before he made a public presentation to the whole church. It also should be considered normal that, when Saul and Barnabas made a report to the whole church on a sensitive issue, some objection should be expressed. Then nothing should be considered strange that the church would refer the debate to the church leadership for further study. That procedure would tend to produce a fair and considered decision. In the light of the democratic way in which the New Testament describes the decisions of the churches, it should cause no surprise that the decision of the apostles and prophets should be reported to the whole church for a definite decision concerning the position of the church on the issue. No reason can be shown why all four meetings could not have occurred during one trip of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem. The accounts in Galatians and Acts do not conflict with each other. They simply tell of different events that occurred in the whole process of the discussion on the subject in the Jerusalem church. The free and open debate between the opposing views gives comfort that the final decision was not made lightly but was fully considered and prayerfully decided.

Paul's reasons for mentioning only his meeting with James, Cephas, and John in Galatians 2:1-10.

It seems strange that Paul would have mentioned only his meeting with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem in his letter to the Galatians, especially since the whole church afterward gave resounding support to his position. However, Paul had a powerful reasons for describing his meeting with James, Cephas, and John and for not describing the formal conference of the whole church.

(1) *His meeting with James, Cephas, and John strongly confirmed his position that he got his doctrine from God, not men. When Saul and Barnabas met with James, Cephas, and John, they met to inform those church leaders of the results of their trip and of the conversion of Gentiles. They did not consult those leaders to ask them to determine if their doctrine was correct. Saul informed James, Cephas, and John about how God was working among the Gentiles, information that the Jerusalem church leaders had no direct contact with because at that time they worked exclusively among Jews in Jerusalem.. In that meeting, Saul was the teacher, not James, Cephas, and John. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul emphasized that what men with big reputations said or thought was not important to him (Gal. 2:6-7). He insisted that the men with big*

reputations had not taught him anything. Instead, he had instructed them. What Paul described in Galatians is exactly what Acts described as happening in his meeting with James, Cephas, and John. After hearing his report, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem agreed that God had called Paul and Barnabas to what they were doing, just as God had called them to do what they were doing. Paul convinced them that his calling and insights were from God, as theirs were. Their positions were equal. He was not seeking approval from them but informing them about how God had given him the same authority and truth that God had given them. James, Cephas, and John's conclusion was exactly what Paul was seeking to prove to the Galatians. It fitted right in with what he wanted the Galatians to understand.

(2) Giving an account of the Jerusalem church's decision could have seemed to be a claim his doctrine was authenticated by a human decision of an authoritative body. His desire was the exact opposite. He desired to emphasize that his doctrine was not authenticated by men but by God. If Paul had emphasized that the formal conference of the church in Jerusalem had agreed with his position, it would have seemed that he got his doctrine from an authoritative body. Such an impression would have defeated the very point he was striving to make.

(3) The conference of the church in Jerusalem was not a meeting of an authoritative body empowered to define doctrine for all churches. The conference was not trying to define what Paul had the authority to preach. The members of the church were trying to settle the position of their church on the question of circumcision so they could share their position with the church in Antioch. However, if Paul had emphasized that meeting, it could easily have been misunderstood. The Galatians could have concluded that an authoritative Council had been held in Jerusalem that they were obligated to accept. The result would have been taken as evidence that an authoritative body was required to define true Christian doctrine. Therefore, Paul just did not mention it. He had ample evidence to support his point from his meeting with James, Cephas, and John and did not need to cloud the issue by using the meeting of the Jerusalem church as evidence. Paul did not deny that the church conference took place. It just did not fit into the emphasis he wanted to make, so he emphasized the private meeting that supported his point that he got his doctrine from God, not men.

Conclusion. These factors show that the trip to Jerusalem that Paul described in Galatians 2:1-10 and the trip that is described in Acts 15:1-29 are one and the same. Each account provides information that the other does not mention, but neither contradicts the other. Together they show that four different meetings were held in Jerusalem go discuss the issue of circumcision. All four meetings arrived at the same conclusion that circumcision is not necessary for salvation.

A SECOND RELATED ISSUE
HOW LONG WAS SAUL'S MINISTRY IN TROAS, CILICIA?

At this point, we are finally able to make a reasoned estimate of the length of Saul's ministry in Troas and Cilicia. The other events in Paul's life that took place between his conversion and his trip to Jerusalem to discuss circumcision are clear enough to enable us to make a reasoned estimate of how long they lasted. Only the length of Paul's ministry in Troas is described vaguely enough to allow for a wide variety of ideas about how long it lasted. If we take the highest estimated length of each of the other events, add them together, and subtract them from the full length of the time between Paul's conversion and his trip to Jerusalem to discuss circumcision, we will have the shortest possible length of his ministry in Troas. Those figures, as estimated on pages 3 and 7 above, are as follows:

ESTIMATED LENGTH OF PAUL'S MINISTRY IN TROAS, CILICIA

	<i>Maximum</i>	<i>Estimated Time</i>
<i>From conversion to trip to Jerusalem to discuss circumcision</i>		<i>14 years</i>
<i>Less from conversion to beginning of Cilician ministry</i>		
<i>Study and ministry in Arabia and Damascus</i>	<i>3 years</i>	
<i>Trip from Damascus to Jerusalem</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>	
<i>Visit in Jerusalem to meet Cephas</i>	<i>4 months</i>	
<i>Trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea, Syria</i>	<i>2 months</i>	
<i>Ministry in Caesarea</i>	<i>4 months</i>	
<i>Trip to Tarsus, Cilicia</i>	<i>2 weeks</i>	
<i>Less from beginning of 1st Antioch ministry to end of 2nd Antioch ministry</i>		
<i>First ministry in Antioch</i>	<i>1 year</i>	
<i>Trip to Jerusalem for famine relief</i>	<i>2 years</i>	
<i>Resumption of first ministry in Antioch</i>	<i>3 months</i>	
<i>First missionary journey, with Barnabas</i>	<i>2½ years</i>	
<i>Second ministry in Antioch</i>	<i>1 year</i>	
<i>Total years subtracted</i>		<u><i>10 years, 8 months</i></u>
<i>Minimum length of ministry in Tarsus, Cilicia</i>		<u><i>3 years, 4 months</i></u>

If those estimated times are even close to being accurate, it is clear that Paul had adequate time in Cilicia to start the churches that he visited on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:41) and again on his third missionary journey (Acts 16:23). These estimated time spans confirm the accuracy of the conclusion that Paul's first actual missionary enterprise was in his home territory of Cilicia, after a brief visit to Jerusalem to meet Peter.

We can also use the above information to fix dates on the events in this part of Paul's life. While Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem to deliver famine relief, Herod Agrippa I died. Because Agrippa was living in Caesarea and was persecuting Christians severely and because Antioch was near to Caesarea, Paul and Barnabas did not return to Antioch until Agrippa died (Acts 11:27-30; 12:20-25). Herod Agrippa I's death is well known in history, and the date of it has been fixed by historians as 44 A.D. Using the estimate time periods above, a reasonably accurate date for each of the events can be calculated as follows:

DATES OF EVENTS IN PAUL'S LIFE
ACCORDING TO TIME ESTIMATES ABOVE

	<u>Length of Activity</u>	<u>Date</u>
Conversion and baptism		32 A.D.
Study and ministry in Arabia and Damascus	3 years	32-35 A.D.
Trip from Damascus to Jerusalem	2 weeks	35 B.C.
Visit in Jerusalem to meet Cephas	4 months	35 A.D.
Trip from Jerusalem to Caesarea, Syria	2 months	35 A.D.
Ministry in Caesarea	4 months	35 A.D.
Trip to Tarsus, Cilicia	2 weeks	35 A.D.
Ministry in Tarsus, Cilicia	3 years, 4 months	36-40 A.D.
First ministry in Antioch	1 year	41 A.D.
Trip to Jerusalem for famine relief	2 years	42-44 A.D.
Resumption of first ministry in Antioch	3 months	44 A.D.
First missionary journey, with Barnabas	2½ years	44-46 A.D.
Second ministry in Antioch	1 year	46 A.D.
TOTAL YEARS	14 years	14 years

A THIRD RELATED ISSUE

***WHAT WAS THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH CONFERENCE IN ACTS 15
AND WHAT DOES IT TEACH US ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AMONG CHURCHES?***

The meetings described in Acts 15 have received intense attention over the years and have been subjected to diverse interpretations. A careful study of the passages should lead to the following conclusions.

A. These passages do not support the concept of General Church Councils. *The meetings of the church in Jerusalem that are described in Galatians 2 and Acts 15 have often been described as a General Church Council, which means an official meeting of delegates from more than one church that is held to define church doctrine authoritatively. Later in Christian history, when church government became centralized and autocratic, General Church Councils were called together occasionally in an attempt to settle disputes among churches. The Roman Catholic Church has determined for itself that some of those Councils were legitimate authoritative Church Councils, while others were not. Catholics consider the Church Councils they recognize, along with the Roman pope, as authoritative in determining their doctrines and practices. They even insist that the decisions of those Councils should be universally binding on all churches. Based on that point of view, it has often been claimed that the meetings of the church in Jerusalem that are described in Galatians 2 and Acts 15 were parts of the first General Church Council. Acts 15, therefore, has been used as evidence that General Church Councils are authorized by Scripture and by God and are empowered to define true Christian doctrine. That position is a serious misinterpretation of the meetings of the Jerusalem church that Galatians 2 and Acts 15 describe. Six factors show that the meetings of the church in Jerusalem did not constitute a General Church Conference:*

(1) The four meetings in Jerusalem that are described in Galatians 1:1-10 and Acts 15 were not meetings of delegates of many churches, authorized to make decisions for all churches. They made no attempt to include even a representative number of the churches that existed at that time. Only two churches were involved, and neither of those two churches sought to exercise authority over the other. Those who

participated in the meetings did not claim to represent the whole Christian movement, and certainly they made no claim of having authority to define official church doctrine. There is not a hint in the Scripture passages to indicate that they claimed to have authority to make decisions that all churches and believers are obligated to accept. They made no pretense of believing that one church had authority over the other church, and they did not even hint that some recognized leaders have authority to determine doctrines and practices for all churches. The letter that the Jerusalem church sent to the church in Antioch actually repudiated those who went to Antioch and claimed to have authority to speak for it. The decision of the Jerusalem church is a warning against anyone who might try to claim the kind of authority that the legalistic members of the Jerusalem church tried to foist on the Antioch church. The meetings in Jerusalem were in no way a General Church Council

(2) The meeting of leaders of the church in Jerusalem that Paul mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10 and that is described in Acts 15:4a was an informal meeting to hear Paul and Barnabas's report before they presented it to the whole church. If that meeting authorized anything, it was to allow Paul and Barnabas to speak to the church, nothing more.

(3) The meeting that is described in Acts 15:4b-5, in which Paul and Barnabas presented their report to the whole church, was a worship and testimony service, not intended to make any kind of authoritative decision. When disputes arose in that meeting because members of the Jerusalem church contested Paul and Barnabas's report, the members recognized that a more formal process needed to be followed to settle the dispute, and a plan was adopted to lead to a prayerful decision. They requested the apostles and prophets of the church to consider the matter and make a recommendation to the church.

(4) The meeting of apostles and elders that is described in Acts 15:6-21 was a meeting of leaders of the church in Jerusalem to give guidance to that church concerning settling a dispute among its own members. The dispute originated when members of the Jerusalem church took it on themselves to speak for the Jerusalem church to the church in Antioch. The dispute became so disruptive that the church decided to send representatives to Jerusalem to learn if the members of that church who had come to them had a right to speak for the whole church and if the church believed what those members said. Paul and Barnabas were sent to Jerusalem to lead the representative group. The dispute actually originated as a dispute among members of the Jerusalem church. It became an open issue in the church when the representatives of the Antioch church arrived to inquire about the position of the Jerusalem church. When the issue was raised in an open meeting of the church, the matter was referred to the apostles and elders of the Jerusalem church. The meeting of the apostles and elders was to give advice to the Jerusalem church about how to settle a controversy that had arisen among their own members. The recommendation that came from the meeting of the apostles and elders was not final in settling the matter. The whole church in Jerusalem had to meet to consider the recommendation and act on it.

(5) The meeting of the whole church that is described in Acts 15:22-29, to which the apostles and prophets presented their recommendations, did not attempt to make a decision that had authority over all churches or even over the two churches in Jerusalem and Antioch. It made a decision for the Jerusalem church only. Their decision was to agree with what the apostles and elders recommended, and it was that decision made by the whole congregation that spoke for the church, not the recommendation of the apostles and prophets. Only when the whole church had spoken did they share their conclusion with the Antioch church (Acts 15:22-29). Then they spoke with a united voice to share the true position of their church.

(6) The Antioch church in turn made its own decision of what it believed, using the advice of the Jerusalem church as helpful information (Acts 15:30-35). The Antioch church accepted the letter from the Jerusalem church as welcome advice, not as an authoritative declaration of what they were obligated to believe. They rejoiced that the Jerusalem church agreed with what they already believed (Acts 15:30-35).

These six factors show that the meetings described in Galatians 2 and Acts 15 consisted of consultations between two churches, both of which were dealing with the same disputed issue. The meetings did not comprise an authoritative body that rendered decisions for all churches. They were meetings of two churches consulting with each other about decisions that each church had to make for itself. Galatians 2 and Acts 15 provide no authority for the concept of General Church Councils that deliver authoritative decrees about church doctrine and practices. Since these passages are the only instances in the Bible that can be claimed as authorizing General Church Councils, the conclusion should be accepted that the Scriptures do not support the idea of having General Church Councils at all.

The testimony of Christian history is that Councils and bishops more often than not have been deceived by their own authority and have gone astray much more easily than any independent body of believers ever has. General Church Councils have not been effective in preserving true doctrine. They have more often than not brought false teachings into the doctrines of churches that recognize them. The reason they have done more harm than good is that it only takes the erroneous decision of one bishop or one Council to deceive a whole denomination or religious group that submits to their authority. General Church Councils have actually stirred up great contests among rival "General" Church Councils. They even have gone so far as to execute some who disagreed with their decisions. They have produced great mischief and have not succeeded in bringing unity of belief and practice among all churches. If this reality had been recognized among all Christians through the years since Paul wrote to the Galatians, much pain and much error would have been avoided. General Church Councils are a human invention, not a divine revelation.

General Church Councils are not God's method of defining His truth, of identifying church beliefs and practices, of determining what constitutes His Bible, or of how to correctly interpret the Bible. All four of those authorities rest in the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone.

B. These passages illustrate the principle of Biblical authority. *When the apostles and prophets of the Jerusalem church met to make recommendations to the church about how to settle the debate over circumcision, their discussions produced only disagreement. Debate, reason, and discussion did not produce an answer (Acts 15:6-7a). Then Peter told of his experience in Joppa, which is now recorded in our Bibles (Acts 15:7b-11; 9:36-10:48). The congregation grew silent, and Paul and Barnabas told of experiences on their missionary journey, which also now are recorded in our Bibles (Acts 15:12; 13:4-14:26). Finally, James quotes Scriptures from Amos and Isaiah and made suggestions based on those Scriptures (Acts 15:13-21; Amos 9:11-12; Is. 45:21). The apostles and prophets quickly agreed because James's suggestions were firmly based on Scripture. Then James's suggestions were presented to the church, and the whole church agreed as well (Acts 15:22-29). It was revelations from God and from Scripture that silenced the debate and guided them into accepting the correct doctrine.*

The same pattern should be followed by churches, groups of church, religious entities, and denominations when they want to come together on a statement of beliefs. When a group of churches, a religious entity, or a denomination seeks to record the beliefs that it holds in common, it must begin by identifying the authority on which it bases its beliefs and practices. The choice almost always comes down to accepting either Councils and bishops on the one hand or Scripture on the other hand. The ultimate authority cannot be both. It must be one or the other. If a church decides its authority is Councils and bishops, it has chosen fallible human beings as its authority. If a church decides its authority is the Bible, it has chosen divine revelations as its authority. Scripture is by far the safest and surest choice. The only safe place to which they should turn for guidance is the Bible. The Bible does not mislead believers, if we accept what it says as it says it and obey it. Scripture, illuminated to us by the Holy Spirit, is the authority God has given to the churches to define true doctrine. Nothing else and no one else.

If a church or denomination truly accepts the Bible as its authority, it does not and should not depend on any person or any Council of persons to validate the authority of Scripture for them. Councils do not authenticate the Scripture or what the content of the Scripture is. The Scripture authenticates itself. It authenticates itself by what it claims for itself and by how well it substantiates those claims. Agreement among billions of believers and hundreds of thousands of churches over the years about what constitutes the Bible has produced amazing agreement on what the Bible is, but essentially the Bible has to prove itself to each believer and each church one by one. All believers, all churches, and all denominations are still faced with the same obligation to make those decisions for themselves.

The church or denomination that agrees together that the Bible is their authority is much more likely to remain true to “the truth once for all delivered to the saints” than any group that trusts a bishop or a Council to make those decisions for them. It takes a great deal more influence to lead astray a whole group of praying believers than it takes to lead astray one human authority, no matter how knowledgeable that authority might be. Happy is the person, church, or denomination that recognizes the same truth about the Bible that the Bible itself has revealed to billions of believers and hundreds of millions of churches over the centuries since Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia.

Accepting one’s responsibility before God to determine one’s own belief about what the Bible is and what the Bible teaches is a much heavier burden than giving that authority to someone else, but that burden is a Scriptural responsibility that should not be given away. It is the safest way for each believer or group of believers to prepare to stand before Jesus and give one’s own personal accounting for his or her beliefs and practices on Judgment Day. Submitting only to the authority of Jesus Christ and of the Word He inspired is a responsibility God gave to each individual believer and to each group of believers. Accept that responsibility without fear, and assume responsibility for your own beliefs and actions. Only then will you truly be prepared to face Jesus when He comes again.

C. These passages illustrate the principle of congregational independence. *Both churches that are represented in these passages clearly recognized the responsibility of each church to govern itself and to determine its doctrines for itself. The meaningful decisions that were made were made by each church separately and were made in meetings in which the whole membership of the church could participate. Each church acted on its own and made decisions for itself, even concerning the doctrines they accepted. The actions of both churches clearly show that each was operating under the concept of independence.*

If a church today desires to develop its polity according to Biblical examples, these passages teach that each church is free and independent and should follow the directions of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, not some human authority. Churches should accept no outside authority and should never surrender to it the power to make decisions for them. The Scriptures teach that Jesus is the head of the church and that He is the sole authority over each church and all churches. Each church must seek direction from the Scriptures for themselves to determine what books they consider to be Scripture, and then they should study those Scriptures under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to determine what doctrines they understand the Scriptures to teach. Then the church should establish its own beliefs about what the Bible teaches by agreement among all its members. It would certainly be appropriate for a church to adopt the same belief statements as another church if the church has studied the Scriptures sufficiently to know that they genuinely agree with the statement they adopt.

Each person, each church, and each denomination will be judged before God on how correctly they have believed and lived. Therefore, all believers should take great care in determining for themselves what they believe, practice, and teach. Then they should determine what group or groups they agree with, so they can cooperate with others to further God’s kingdom. None should accept the authority of anyone else to make

those decisions for them. All believers should seek God's guidance in making those decisions for themselves, as Paul did, as the Jerusalem church did, and as the Antioch church did.

At the same time, no person should feel free to stir up controversy in a church by disputing what a church has settled as its belief. When a member finds he is not in agreement with the doctrines held by his church, he should quietly seek another church with which he agrees. Then each church can work harmoniously without dissent, and both can further advance the kingdom of God.

D. These passages also clearly illustrate the principle of congregational cooperation. *Both the Jerusalem church and the Antioch church reached their own conclusions about the question of circumcision, and each church made its decision separately. However, both churches welcomed the counsel and advice of the other church as they sought their solution. The Antioch church sent representatives to the Jerusalem church to find out if the members who had come to them were correctly representing the church in Jerusalem and if the Jerusalem church believed what those members were teaching. When the representatives of the Antioch church arrived in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem church eagerly heard their testimony about their missionary activities and about their success in winning Gentiles to Christ. Then the Jerusalem church made its decision on the disputed issue and shared it with the Antioch church. The Antioch church in turn appreciated the information sent to them by the Jerusalem church and used it in making their own independent decision on the matter. The actions of both churches clearly show that each operated under the concept of cooperation. Each church considered the other to be knowledgeable in the Lord and friendly in spirit. They helped each other. That cooperation did not take away any of their independence. It did make them stronger and wiser.*

If a church today desires to develop its practices according to Biblical examples, these passages teach that each church should eagerly seek fellowship with other churches and should cooperate with those other churches concerning important decisions and actions. They should not attempt to stand isolated and alone in the face of a hostile world. They should help and encourage each other. Christians need the fellowship, counsel, and example of other Christians, not to make decisions or perform service for them, but to counsel them about their decisions and to advise them about their actions. Churches need the benefit of that same kind of relationship with other churches. The church that seeks out and depends on fellowship and advice from other churches greatly enhances its success.