

DEFENDERS OF GRACE LIBERTY

Paul used the temporal adverb (epeita / then) three times to identify a dating sequent of events related to his conversion and calling to be a defender of grace liberty.

- Gal.1: 18 – *then* three years later I went to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas.
- Gal.1:21 – *then* I went to the region of Syria and Cilicia.
- Gal.2:1 – *then* after an interval of 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas , taking Titus.

Paul used these three events in his defense of his liberty to preach the gospel of grace salvation to the Gentiles that had been challenged by the Judaizers (legalists).

These Judaizers held that Gentile converts like Titus should be circumcised to complete their salvation experience. “Unless you are circumcised according to the customs of Moses, you cannot be saved.” (Acts 15:1)

This lesson will study SIX aspects of Paul’s challenge to spiritual advancing believers to become DEFENDERS OF GRACE LIBERTY.

1. The Judaizers created a theological fear among the leadership of the Jerusalem church regarding Paul evangelistic grace ministry (Acts 15:2; Gal.2: 2).

“But certain ones of the sect of the Pharisees who had believed, stood up, saying, it is necessary to circumcise them, and to direct them to observe the Law of Moses.” (Acts 15:5)

“And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, *for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.*” (Gal.2:2)

2. This led to the first church leadership conference at Jerusalem.

At this conference, Paul became the defender of grace liberty for the evangelistic cause of the gospel of grace salvation (Eph.2: 8-9).

Paul won this theological debate with the great sermon recorded in Acts 15:7-11. An excerpt taken from this sermon says, “But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (Acts 15:11)

3. The church leadership of the Jerusalem conference drafted a church decree regarding the controversy between grace salvation and works salvation.

“Therefore it is my judgment (James, pastor of Jerusalem church) that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles.” (Acts 15:19)

“But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (Acts 15:11)

“Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.” (Gal.2:16)

4. Unfortunately the Judaizers left the Jerusalem church conference determined to shut down Paul's evangelistic grace ministry.

Paul described the bondage of legalism at the Jerusalem conference as testing God by placing upon the necks of the disciples a yoke which none can carry (Acts 15:10).

Jesus had said the same thing about Pharisaical legalists in Matt.23: 4 – “And they tie-up loads, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger.”

Paul referred to the Judaizers as false brethren (pseudadelphos) because of their pretense to be like-minded with Paul's evangelistic ministry but attacked grace (Eph.2: 8-9). The Judaizers intention was to destroy the liberty of grace and to bring the grace believers into the bondage of legalism.

“But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.” (Gal.2:4)

5. As a result, Paul became the great Defender of Grace Liberty.

“But we did not yield in subjection to them for even one hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.” (Gal.2: 5)

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jews first and also to the Greeks.” (Rom.1: 16)

“The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel.” (Phil.1:16)

“For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart, since both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me.” (Phil.1:7)

“For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” (Rom.3: 28)

“Being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;” (Rom.3: 24)

“I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” (Gal.2: 21)