

## Commentary – Galatians – Dunnam

Maxie D. Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, gen. ed. (Waco, TX. Word Inc., 1982),

### **Galatians 2: 10 (Collection):**

*They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.*

Along with the agreement that the gospel to the uncircumcised was committed to Paul and to the circumcised committed to Peter went the request that Paul and Barnabas should continue to remember the poor (v.10). Paul said this was “*the very thing which I also was eager to do.*” The Galatians knew how earnest Paul was in this matter. During his ministry among them he urged them to remember the poor (1 Cor. 16:1). He attached great importance to raising funds for the poor (2 Cor. 8-9; Rom. 15:25-28). Two ideas were behind this emphasis: such giving was an expression of gratitude for the love and grace of Christ, and such sharing was a means of knitting the Gentile and Jewish members of the body of Christ together in the Spirit. Here are pivotal concepts for an understanding of Christian stewardship: *gratitude and solidarity*. We give because we are grateful, and we give cheerfully. In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul makes a marvelous statement about the spirit of giving as he writes about the offering he is taking for the saints: Be ready to give “as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.” “Bounty” literally means “blessing.”<sup>1</sup>

*Solidarity* is the concept that because we belong to Christ we belong to each other. We are one body, and the needs and concern of one are the concerns of all. There was an added unique dimension to this truth in the early church. The gospel, in Palestine and abroad, found its most receptive hearing among the poor, the underprivileged, the slaves. The early Christian community was often referred to as “the beggars.” It was an honorable title for the people whom Jesus called blessed. They were materially and spiritually at their wit’s end. Then

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<sup>1</sup> Maxie D. Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*. Lloyd J. Ogilvie, gen. ed. (Waco, TX. Word Inc., 1982), 39.

Jesus came and filled their lives with joy and meaning and bound them together in a fellowship so strong that the rich sold their goods to give to the poor. When the Spirit came with power at Pentecost it brought a unity of spirit and purpose – a solidarity that resulted in a glorious period of joyful sharing of all that the community possessed. Unfortunately that period couldn't last forever. The second coming expectantly awaited, was delayed and resources were exhausted. The unbelieving Jews who controlled the temple treasury were unsympathetic to the Jews who had newly become *Christian*. When they expelled them from the synagogues and denied them relief money from the temple treasury, the need for solidarity was intensified. Christians from other places were kept aware of the needs of Christians in Palestine [Jerusalem] where resources were limited, poverty rampant, and political strife the normal experience. Thus our missionary enterprise has been characterized by a concern for the plight of the poor, the enslaved, the disenfranchised of every nation. Ministering to physical needs is not separated from spiritual needs. Both from Christ's redemptive love as expressed in the lives of his followers. <sup>2</sup>

**2:15-16: Justified by faith not by works**

*We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.*

The heart of the Gospel and Paul's immortal expression of it is in verse 16: *a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.*  
<sup>3</sup>

Law, as conceived and experienced by Paul and his fellow Jews was nowhere near our present understanding of it in a twentieth century state of representative government. The function of modern law is to govern the

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<sup>2</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatians*, 40.

<sup>3</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatians*, 43.

relations of persons with each other and with institutions. Such law makes no determination of a person's relationship to God. For the Jews the opposite was true. Obedience to the Law rendered one in right relationship to God. Works of the Law were those deeds done in obedience to the Torah, rather than those things done according to one's own will. The object of obedience was to justify oneself in relation to God in order to be accepted by Him. The anguishing turmoil running through Israel's effort at salvation confirms Paul's experience that no effort on the part of persons is ever adequate to make one righteous before God. Psalm 143 gives expression to this anguish: *Hear my prayer, O LORD; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness.* <sup>2</sup> *Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.* (Ps. 143:1-2, NIV). Paul had personified the Jew's ardent struggle to be righteous by the law. His strenuous efforts to "get right" with God were always thwarted by the weakness of his sinful human nature. He knew the depressing abyss of failure in to which one could fall, doing what he decidedly didn't want to do, and failing to do what he desperately want to do (cf. Rom. 7:15-20). He could conclude from the history of his race and from his own futile effort that "*by the works of the law no flesh will be justified.*" <sup>4</sup>

Righteousness and justification: "*Justified*" is a metaphor from a court of law. The Greek for this comes from a root word meaning "point out" or "show." The English root "*right*," is coming from the Anglo-Saxon "*right*," which means "straight," not crooked. A person is "right" when he conforms to a standard of acceptable character or conduct. The state or quality of this conformity is "*righteousness*" (rightness), or "*justice*." In Latin the corresponding terms are *justifico*, *justus*, and *justificatio*. In Hebrew you have the same meaning, so that in the four languages the idea is that of a norm by which persons or things are tested. Thus in Hebrew a persons is "*righteous*" when he does God's will. Likewise, a wall is "righteous" when it conforms to a plumb [vertical/upright]

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<sup>4</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatians*, 44.

line. To justify is to rectify in relation to a norm. To justify is to make *right*, not to make just or fair or equitable. Understanding it thus, Paul can conclude that “if righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died in vain” (v. 21). *Righteousness* as it is being used refers not to a quality of goodness but to a relationship. It is God who justifies, rectifies. No law could force our unruly nature to comply with God’s norm. To follow the judicial metaphor, one has to admit that one is a guilty criminal and throw oneself on the mercy of the judge. Then the unbelievable, radical thing happens. God, the judge, contrary to all expectation, not only acquits the guilty one, but accepts him as a son, makes him with Christ a fellow heir of the kingdom. We cannot understand Paul, nor can we participate fully in the Christian experience, until we grasp the fact that to be *justified* means that as sinners we are “acquitted,” “accepted,” “set right with God,” “saved” despite our sin. What then is the “righteousness” of God? His righteousness is his justifying action in relation to persons. Paul stated in his letter to the Romans: “But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” (*Rom. 3:21-22 RSV*). His righteousness, then, is his justification of all –Jew and Gentile alike. His unique nature is that he “justifies the ungodly.” *A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ*” (v. 16).<sup>5</sup>

Paul thus included all Gentiles, who otherwise could have never been justified nor become the children of God. The whole of his theology was to bring the Gentiles in this mission of kingdom building. We can see his heart for the Gentiles.

### **Gal. 3:28: Equality (one in Christ)**

He wanted the Gentile converts to know that there is no reason for them to try to put themselves right by circumcision, by becoming like the Jews. For “*there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus* (v. 28).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatians*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatia*, 79.

Paul could have added other categories –Catholics, Protestants, professors, mechanics, preachers, domestic workers, whites, blacks –for in Christ all social stations, all cultural labels, all races and nationalities are made of no account in the economy of God. Righteousness, wisdom, authority, religion, achievement matter nothing for salvation.

*All become one in Christ Jesus.* Our solidarity as humans is not in our innate goodness, not due to the spark of divinity residing in every self. Our solidarity is in our bondage to sin. In this solidarity there is neither Jew nor Greek. God justifies us all on the basis of our trust response, and we become *one in Christ*. All who belong to Christ, Gentiles as well as Jews, are heirs of that promise [to Abraham].<sup>7</sup>

**5: 13-14: Love your neighbor**

*... through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'*

The love that was defined in the law by God to Moses (Lev. 19:18), and reiterated by Jesus (Mark 12: 29-31) and now restated by Paul: “*You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (5:14). “By love serve one another [slave to one another-NIV] (v. 13). This is what Jesus meant when he said we would save our lives by losing them. If we give our life in love to others we will find it. “If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another” (v. 15). Here is losing and finding of life in a person. <sup>8</sup> Albert Schweitzer said, “there are two classes of people in this world –the helpers, and the non-helpers. It is the way we find ourselves –by losing ourselves [by giving what we have to the poor], and the criterion of Christian freedom [also love] is serving one another in love. Dunnam gave a story of a woman who could not get everything that would satisfy and give meaning until she could give “everything.”*

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<sup>7</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatian*, 79.

<sup>8</sup> Dunnam. *The Communicator's Commentary on Galatian*, 107.

