

THE EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

GALATIANS 1:1-10, INTRODUCTION

A. Paul's salutation (1-5)

1. The senders of the epistle (1-2a)

- a. Paul identified himself as an apostle (1), *Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—*

1) Definition of an apostle

- a) The word means *one who is sent*.

b) New Testament usage

- 1] In the restricted sense, one who has received a special commission from the risen Christ (the twelve apostles and Paul).
- 2] In a more general sense, it refers to those sent with a message from God as in Acts 14:14, *But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out,*

2) Qualifications of an apostle (restricted sense)

- a) One selected by Jesus who was with Him from the beginning of His earthly ministry, Acts 1:22, *beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.*
- b) On who possessed special miraculous powers given to authenticate apostleship, 2 Corinthians 12:12, *The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with utmost patience, with signs and wonders and mighty works.*

3) Paul's qualifications

- a) *not from men* - it did not originate from men, Galatians 1:11, *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.*
- b) *nor through man*
 - 1] It came through Jesus Christ, Galatians 1:12, *For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*
 - 2] Jesus' authority to assign Paul this office was confirmed because Jesus was raised from the dead by God the Father, Acts 2:24, *God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.*
- c) He saw the risen Christ, 1 Corinthians 9:1, *Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?*
- d) He possessed the miraculous powers of an apostle, Romans 15:19, *by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ;*
- e) He was selected *by the will of God* to minister with the authority of an apostle to Gentiles in contrast to the false teachers.
 - 1] Acts 9:15, *But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.*
 - 2] 1 Timothy 2:7, *For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.*

4) Importance of Paul's claim to be an apostle equal in stature to the Twelve.

- a) Enemies of the Gospel in Galatia were claiming that Paul had received his apostolic commission from other men.
- b) It was being suggested that it came from other apostles or the leaders of the church at Antioch which would have made his apostleship inferior.
- c) If Paul's apostleship was conferred by man then his message could be up for debate.

- b. All the brothers with Paul greeted the Galatians (2a), **and all the brothers who are with me**,
 - 1) These were fellow workers which possibly included Barnabas.
 - 2) It could have included prophets and teachers in Antioch, Acts 13:1, *Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.*
 - 3) John Stott, *He is happy to associate them with him in the salutation, but he unashamedly puts himself first and gives himself a title which he does not give to them. They are all 'brethren' ;he alone among them is 'an apostle.'*
 - 4) Donald Campbell, *Mentioning these co-laborers emphasized the fact that the teachings of this epistle were not peculiar to Paul but were held in common with others.*

2. Paul's greeting (2b-5)
 - a. The recipients of the letter were the churches of Galatia (2b), **To the churches of Galatia**:
 - 1) As noted earlier, the letter was probably written to the churches founded by Paul in the southern Roman province of Galatia on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). Specific churches included Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe and Antioch.
 - 2) This is the only epistle of Paul written to a group of churches instead of to one church or individual.
 - 3) Warren Wiersbe, *He was not writing to them as a stranger, but as the one who had brought them the message of life in the beginning! This letter reveals Paul's affection for these believers . Unfortunately, this affection was not being returned to him.*
 - 4) Max Anders, *Throughout this chapter Paul cites his association with the apostles and key church leaders as a way to substantiate his credibility and apostleship.*

 - b. He desired that the Christians of Galatia would experience grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (3), **Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**,
 - 1) Paul gave them a two-part blessing.
 - a) First, there is *grace*.
 - 1] It is God's unmerited favor and enablement.
 - 2] It is most evidently seen in the Gospel, Ephesians 2:8, *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,*
 - b) Second, there is *peace from God and the Lord Jesus Christ*.
 - 1] This is the inner confidence God gives to those who have received His grace through Christ.
 - 2] Romans 5:1, *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - 3] Max Anders, *Peace represents life in its wholeness or fullness, a life filled with a sense of satisfaction that only God can give.*
 - c) This is Paul's first letter and this salutation became standard in all his blessings, a summary of the Gospel message, Ephesians 1:2, *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *The three-fold title "Lord Jesus Christ" indicates His exalted rank, His saving significance, and His divine commission respectively.*

 - c. He expressed the Gospel as the work of Jesus Christ and the will of God (4), **who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father**,
 - 1) Jesus gave Himself
 - a) *for our sins*
 - 1] 2 Corinthians 5:21, *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*
 - 2] 1 Peter 3:18, *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,*
 - 3] Jesus' one-time work on the cross transferred us from spiritual death to life transferring us from the power of Satan to the power of Christ, Colossians 1:13, *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,*

- b) *to deliver us from the present evil age*
 - 1] Jesus delivers us from the world system that dominates this era between His first and second coming.
 - 2] John 15:19, *If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*
 - 3] Thomas Constable, *We are in the world, but we are free to live apart from the evil that dominates it thanks to Christ's work for us.*

2) *according to the will of our God and Father*

- a) The work of Jesus Christ for mankind came from the heart of God.
- b) It was His will for His Son to redeem us from our sins.
- c) Hebrews 10:7, *Then I said, 'Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.'*

d. God alone is worthy of glory forever and ever (5), ***to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.***

- 1) In Jesus' obedience to the will of God, He brought glory to God.
- 2) John 17:1, *When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,*
- 3) Max Anders, *Forever we will praise God for his grace which saves us from both the penalty and power of sin.*

e. Paul set his battle plan against those who wanted to change the message of the Gospel.

- 1) Donald Campbell, *He had affirmed his own apostleship and had declared that the basis of man's salvation lies solely in the work of Christ and not in any human works.*
- 2) At the beginning of Paul's letter to the Galatians, he did not speak kindly of their faithfulness but set out His authority to declare the true message of the Gospel.

B. Paul's rebuke (6-10)

1. Paul was astonished that Galatians were leaving the Gospel of grace for a distorted message of works (6-7)

a. The Galatians were leaving the message of grace for a different message (6), ***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—***

1) *astonished*

- a) It can mean *rebuke, disapproval and disappointment.*
- b) Paul was rebuking the Galatians for deserting God who called them, note Galatians 5:8, *This persuasion is not from him who calls you.*
- c) Donald Campbell, *Conspicuous by its absence is Paul's usual expression of thanksgiving to God for his readers. Instead he vented his astonishment and anger over the Galatians' defection. When compared with the opening of 1 Corinthians this is even more striking, for despite the Corinthians' deep moral defection Paul nonetheless expressed commendation. But here in the face of theological departure he did not express thanks, thus emphasizing the more serious nature of doctrinal apostasy.*

2) *so quickly deserting*

- a) It signified *to transfer one's allegiance, to be a turncoat.*
- b) It referred to soldiers who revolt or desert and of men who change sides in politics or philosophy.
- c) The Galatians' desertion was quick.
 - 1] Paul and Barnabas evangelized Galatia on their first missionary journey (Acts 13-14).
 - 2] It is believed that the Galatians turned from the Gospel presented by Paul within a few months of their departure.
 - 3] Their desertion was not specifically against Paul but against God who called them in the grace of Christ.

d) Paul identified the distinction between the Gospel and all other imitators, grace.

b. There is only one Gospel and it is a message of grace (7a), ***not that there is another one,***

- 1) The Gospel is not a message like ice cream which can have many flavors.
- 2) The struggle in Galatia was between grace and works.

- 3) It is the age old heresy of faith plus something.
 - a) In Galatia the new flavor was the necessity of circumcision, Galatians 6:12, *It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.*
 - b) Another was observation of ceremonial law, Galatians 4:10, *You observe days and months and seasons and years!*
 - c) The false teachers were declaring that Jesus is not enough because salvation demands more.
 - d) Donald Campbell, *...they were embracing a different gospel, one that was false. Paul insisted that a gospel of legalism which adds work to faith is not the same kind of gospel that he preached and by which they were saved. It was actually an attempt to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

- 4) The fulness of the Gospel is summed up in the word grace.
 - a) Acts 20:24, *But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.*
 - b) Grace in the Gospel.
 - 1] God is gracious to undeserving sinners.
 - 2] God by grace gave His Son to die for us.
 - 3] God calls sinners to Himself by grace.
 - 4] God by grace justifies sinners who respond by faith.
 - c) John Stott, *Nothing is due to our efforts, merits or works; everything in salvation is due to the grace of God.*

- c. They were being troubled by those who distorted the Gospel of grace (7b), ***but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.***
 - 1) False teachers were troubling Galatian believers.
 - a) General comments on those distorting the Gospel.
 - 1] Galatians 5:10, *I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.*
 - 2] 2 Corinthians 11:13, *For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.*
 - b) The word *trouble* means to *shake* or *agitate*.
 - 1] False teachers had thrown the Galatians into a state of turmoil.
 - 2] The Jerusalem Council would use the same word for *trouble* in their letter to the churches, Acts 15:24, *Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions,*
 - 3] Warren Wiersbe, *No wonder Paul was anxious for his converts: they were going through great agitation because of the false doctrines that had been brought to the churches. Grace always leads to peace (see Gal. 1:3), but the believers had deserted grace and therefore had no peace in their hearts...They had begun their Christian lives in the Spirit, but now they were going to try to continue in the power of the flesh.*
 - 2) They were changing the Gospel message.
 - a) The word for *distort* means to *turn one thing into another*.
 - 1] Acts 2:20, *the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.*
 - 2] James 4:9, *Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.*
 - b) Paul was very clear when he identified the message as *the gospel of Christ*. Christ is the content of the message as well as the source of the message. Note Galatians 3:3, *Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?*
 - c) Max Anders, *Anyone who presents a way of salvation that depends in any way on works, rather than God, has contaminated the gospel message. They confuse honest, sincere believers. They have no gospel, no good news.*
 - d) John Stott, *...You cannot touch the gospel and leave the church untouched, because the church is created and lives by the gospel. Indeed, the church's greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it, but those inside who try to change the gospel. It is they who trouble the church.*

- e) Grant Osborne, *These opponents were preaching a false gospel, distorted by their replacement of Christ's sacrificial death on the cross with the centrality of circumcision and the law as the basis for salvation.*
- 3) A biblical understanding of the Gospel.
- a) Purposes
- 1] It is the only message of salvation for mankind, Romans 1:16, *For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.*
 - 2] It is a message of condemnation for those who reject it, 1 Peter 4:17, *For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God; and if it begins with us, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?*
- b) Characteristics
- 1] The Gospel is supernatural
 - a] It is a message from and about Jesus Christ, Galatians 1:11-12, *For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*
 - b] It is confirmed by the Holy Spirit, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, *because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake.*
 - c] It is a heavenly message, 1 Peter 1:12, *It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.*
 - d] It is a message opposed by the forces of evil, 2 Corinthians 4:4, *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*
 - 2] The Gospel is a one of a kind message, Galatians 1:6-7, *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*
 - 3] The Gospel is supremely powerful, 2 Timothy 1:10, *and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel,*
 - 4] The Gospel must be proclaimed worldwide, Mark 13:10, *And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations.*
2. Paul declared that anyone who proclaims a message other than the one of grace should be condemned (8-9)
- a. A condemnation for false teachers (8), ***But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.***
- 1) The message received by Paul from Jesus Christ is unchangeable.
 - a) Even if the message received from Paul were changed by Paul, it must not be received. Paul has been accused of personal spite against those who changed his message but he impartially included himself in the curse to come.
 - b) An angel from heaven does not have the authority to change the message of the Gospel.
 - 1] 2 Corinthians 11:14, *And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*
 - 2] John Stott, *The devil disturbs the church as much by error as by evil. When he cannot entice Christian people into sin, he deceives them with false doctrine.*
 - 2) Paul stated a hypothetical case: Let anyone be accursed who preaches a message contrary to what they received from Paul.
 - a) *contrary*
 - 1] It means *in opposition to*.
 - 2] Romans 16:17, *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.*
 - 3] F. F. Bruce, *...if the law was still in force as a way of salvation and life, the messianic age had not yet dawned, and Jesus accordingly was not the Messiah.*

- b) *accursed*
 - 1] The word transfers from the Greek as *anathema*.
 - 2] It means *to come under God's judgment, eternally condemned*.
 - 3] The word was used in the Old Testament for the divine ban, the curse of God on anything or anyone devoted by God to destruction. Note Achan who took things from the Canaanites which should have been destroyed, note Joshua 7:10-26.
- 3) Paul's intent is that the Galatian churches return to the unchangeable message of the Gospel.
 - a) He is strongly encouraging the Galatians to not give a hearing to the false teachers.
 - b) 2 John 10-11, *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.*
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, *The test of a man's ministry is not popularity, or miraculous signs and wonders, but his faithfulness to the Word of God;*
- b. The condemnation repeated (9), ***As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.***
 - 1) Paul repeated his warning for emphasis and has been said, repetition is the key to learning.
 - 2) John Brown, *The apostle repeats it to show the Galatians that this was no excessive, exaggerated statement, into which passion had hurried him, but his calmly formed and unalterable opinion.*
 - 3) Max Anders, *Any person who preaches a gospel that requires more than God's grace for salvation deserves to suffer in hell for eternity.*
- 3. Paul's purpose in preaching the Gospel was to please God (10)
 - a. He did not change the Gospel so that people would be pleased (10a), ***For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?***
 - 1) The Judaizers declared that Paul was teaching freedom from the Law in order to gain favor with the Gentiles.
 - 2) Max Anders, *Paul's critics accused him of preaching "easy believism" because he did not include the law as grounds for salvation and Christian maturity. They claimed Paul watered down the gospel, by omitting the law, to increase his popularity among the Gentiles.*
 - 3) Paul was not influenced by the opinions of man but by his accountability to God Who directly gave him the message of the Gospel.
 - b. He presented the Gospel given to Him as a servant of Christ (10b), ***If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.***
 - 1) Paul could have been a man pleaser by remaining a zealous Pharisee who promoted the Law.
 - 2) Leon Morris, *There have always been preachers who have sought popular acclaim above all else, and there are some still. It is part of fallen human nature that even those charged with the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel can fall into the trap of trying to be popular rather than faithful.*
 - 3) His pleasure was in pleasing God, 1 Thessalonians 2:4, *but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.*
 - c. He considered the message of the Gospel too important to allow it to be corrupted.
 - 1) John Stott, *He was not writing about some trivial doctrine, but about something that is fundamental to the gospel. Nor was he speaking of those who merely hold false views, but of those who teach them and mislead others by their teaching.*
 - 2) Jesus emphasized the severity of punishment for those who causes others to stumble, Mark 9:42, *Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea.*
 - 3) John Stott, *As for actually desiring false teachers to fall under the curse of God and be treated as such by the church, the very idea is to many inconceivable. But I venture to say that if we cared more for the glory of Christ and for the good of the souls of men, we too would not be able to bear the corruption of the gospel of grace.*

CONCLUSION

- A. Paul could hardly believe that Galatians were deserting the Gospel of grace for a message of works.
- B. Paul condemned those who changed the message of the Gospel.
- C. Paul declared that his sole purpose was to please God by faithfully proclaiming the Gospel.