

Lesson One

(1:1-10)

Salutation (1:1-5)

1 Paul an apostle – not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – 2 and all the brethren who are with me.

To the churches of Galatia:

3 God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

As Paul reminds us later in this epistle (4:13-19), the Christians in Galatia were his own spiritual children in the faith. Paul is writing, then, to people he loves very deeply. Significantly, however, Paul omits the words of thanksgiving and commendation which usually opens his letters. Because of the gravity of the problem in Galatia, Paul gets right to work.

V. 1 Paul An Apostle – Until the First Missionary Journey (Acts 13:9), Paul was known by the Hebrew name Saul. It was by this name that we first met him (Acts 7:58) as one who helped in the stoning of Stephen. The name Paul is a Roman name.

The word “apostle” comes from the Greek word *apostolos* which means “one sent forth.” In its special use here in the New Testament it refers to the men personally chosen and sent out by Jesus. Jesus promised these men inspiration (John 14:26) and gave them unique authority in the founding of the church (John 20:21-23, Ephesians 2:20). Paul was chosen to be an apostle by Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:12-18). Paul will spend most of the next two chapters proving his apostleship.

Not From Men Nor Through Man - Paul was not like the false apostles (II Cor. 11:13) whose authority was only from men. Neither was he like Matthias (Acts 1:26) who was chosen by God through the agency of men. Paul’s calling was directly from God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Raised Him From The Dead - The Galatians needed more than anything else to learn the significance of Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection. The gospel facts, properly understood, would end forever their turning back to legalism.

V. 2 And All the Brethren - Paul did not stand alone in the doctrine of salvation by grace instead of works of law. This was the belief of all the church - it was the teaching of the Lord. It was not Paul who was out of step with the Galatians; the Galatians were out of step with all the rest.

The Churches of Galatia - It is unlikely that these churches were in that area of central Asia Minor usually marked as Galatia on Bible maps. We have no knowledge of any journeys by Paul into that area. Probably this refers to the area to the south which includes the cities of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:14 - 14:23). While some maps mark this as Lycaonia, the political boundaries drawn up by Rome included this area with the area to the north, and called all of it Galatia. It is interesting that Paul was first worshipped, then stoned, at one of these cities (Acts 14:11-19).

V. 3 Grace To You - Every one of the thirteen epistles signed by Paul begins and ends with a note of grace. Could it be that a man who had so violently persecuted the church simply felt a greater appreciation for God’s grace? The word “grace” is often defined as “unmerited favor.” What this means is that although we are unworthy and undeserving, God likes us anyway! Grace is goodwill, favor, and loving kindness -- to people who do not deserve it.

And Peace - Peace is best defined as “well-being of the soul.” The Christian has inner peace because there is first peace with God through the sacrifice of Christ. This is of utmost importance in the Galatian problem of legalism.

It has often been noted that “grace” (*charis*) is very similar in Greek to the usual Greek greeting (*chairein*). Also, “peace” was the usual Hebrew greeting (*shalom*). Since so much of Paul’s ministry involved bringing together Jews and Greeks into one body (Eph. 3:6-7), it seems somehow appropriate that this Greek-Jew greeting should begin each of his epistles.

God The Father - Paul speaks of the Father three times in these opening verses. Perhaps this helps prepare the way for the arguments for our sonship through Christ in Chapters three and four.

Our Lord Jesus Christ - The title “Lord” is used in Greek for an owner of property; a master of slaves; a deity to be worshipped. It was even used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in place of the unspeakable name Jehovah or Yahweh. The Lord Jesus is the Lord of all lords (Rev. 19:16). Consider all that the title “Lord” implies, then read Luke 6:46.

“Jesus” was the historical name given by the angel to both Mary (Luke 1:31) and Joseph (Matt. 1:21). It is the same as the Old Testament name Joshua, and means “Jehovah is salvation.”

“Christ” simply means “anointed,” and is the equivalent of the Hebrew word “Messiah.” In the Old Testament, reference is made to the anointing of prophets (Isa. 61:1), priests (Exod. 29:7), and Kings (I Sam. 15:1). The long-awaited Messiah or Christ was anointed our great Prophet, Priest, and King.

V. 4 Who Gave Himself For Our Sins - Jesus carried our sins to the cross to pay the penalty for our sins (I Pet. 2:24 and Rom. 6:23). The question which must be answered by the Galatians and all other legalists is this: Did Jesus succeed in the mission to the cross, or not? If Jesus paid for our sins, we cannot. If Jesus failed to pay for our sins, we must try to do it ourselves. And we will do this with the sentence of death hanging over us at the first wrong step (Gal. 3:10).

To Deliver Us - The Greek word for “deliver” meant literally “to snatch out.” The book of Acts provides an excellent commentary on this word, using it in these ways:

- a. The rescue of Joseph from his afflictions (7:10).
- b. The deliverance of Israel from Egypt (7:34).
- c. The rescue of Peter from prison (12:11).
- d. The rescue of Paul from the temple mob (23:27).
- e. The deliverance of Paul from the Jews (26:17).

From The Present Evil Age - Long before Jesus came, the Jews spoke of two ages. The first was characterized by evil and was the age in which they lived. The second would be known for righteousness and would be ushered in by the Messiah. Paul is pointing out, then, that the Messiah has come and the rescue has been accomplished.

According To The Will Of Our God And Father - It is not God’s will that any man should perish, but rather that every man should come to repentance and be saved (II Pet. 3:9).

V. 5 To Whom Be The Glory - The word “glory” is surrounded with the imagery of light. It pictures God as clothed in radiance, splendor, and magnificence. Glory must be recognized as rightly belonging only to God. Honor and praise did not belong to Paul (1:10, 24) or the church leaders in Jerusalem (2:6) or to the false teachers (4:17). The glory belongs to God through Christ (6:14)!

No Other Gospel (1:6-10)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel -- 7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, If any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

10 Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ.

V. 6 I Am Astonished - Paul has just finished the shortest and least complimentary of all his introductory greetings. Now, the very first word is: "I am astonished"! How very much like a parent who is scolding a child for his shockingly wrong behavior! Perhaps a very gradual, slow decline into false doctrine is understandable, but this had happened in a very few years.

So Quickly Deserting - The word "deserting" involves a fundamental change in character, as when Jezebel "changed" Ahab (I Kg. 21:25). In secular Greek history, when Dionysius deserted the Stoics and went over to the Epicureans (notice Acts 17:18), he was called "the Turncoat" or "Traitor." The word used for his reversal of attitude is here applied to the Galatians.

Him Who Called You In The Grace Of Christ - This probably refers to the Father (1:15-16), although it could also refer to Paul himself. The important point is this: In turning away from the one who called them, they were abandoning the grace of Christ.

Turning To A Different Gospel - The King James Version is confusing at this point (" . . . unto another gospel: which is not another.") Two separate Greek words are used, making an important distinction. In verse six it is a "different" (*heteros*) gospel to which they turned. In verse seven they are told that their gospel is not "another-of-the-same-kind" (*allos*) gospel.

V. 7 Not That There Is Another Gospel - There is only one gospel, and it is the gospel of grace. How long will people go on in their dangerous folly. "It doesn't matter what you believe"? Worse yet was the false view of certain Galatians that the gospel of law-keeping was the only truth.

Some Who Trouble You - Paul refers several times to the false teachers operating in Galatia, but he never pinpoints them by name. He chose rather to describe their doctrine and to warn Christians to beware of any teachers who match the description.

Want To Pervert The Gospel Of Christ - By adding the rite of circumcision and other works of law to the gospel, the false teachers were making much more than a minor altercation. As the Greek word implies, they were "completely turning around" the gospel truth. Their "good news" was bad news.

V. 8 Even If We, Or An Angel From Heaven - The faith has been "once for all delivered to the saints" (Judg. 3). No one - not even apostles or angels - can change it. Even if an angel actually did appear to Joseph Smith, founder of the Mormons, it still would not matter. The gospel cannot be changed. We can neither add to it teachings of our own liking, nor can we subtract from it whatever does not please us.

A Gospel Contrary To That Which We Preached - Please remember the context of this well-known passage. The gospel contrary to the truth was the gospel of legalism. How awful that some of the worst legalists in the world should seize this verse to serve themselves! Preaching the very gospel Paul condemned, they then boldly proclaim. "And if anyone preaches anything contrary to what we preach, let him be accursed!"

Let Him Be Accursed - To be "accursed" meant to be "set up" to God. The same word was used in reference to the city of Jericho before its destruction by Joshua (Joshua 6:18). The city and all its contents were to be destroyed, according to the will of God. We should view all those who pervert the gospel as people marked by God for ultimate destruction.

V. 9 So Now I say Again - The solemn repetition of the warning accentuates the gravity of the matter. Let no man miss the point!

If Any One Is Preaching To You - There is a subtle, but important, difference between the warnings of verse 8 and verse 9. The first warning is projected into the future and is only hypothetical: "Even if we should preach . . ." The warning of this verse is stated in the present tense, and points to a situation that is all too real: "If any one is preaching. . ."

Contrary To That Which You Received - The Galatians were not in doubt as to what Paul was now preaching. The gospel does not change. What they received in the beginning was still true now, and would always be true. The Galatians were perfectly competent to compare for

themselves the old gospel with the new. With reference to the gospel it has well been said, "If it's new, it's not true. If it's true, it's not new."

V. 10 Am I Now Seeking The Favor Of Men - Paul was apparently being accused of abandoning the Law to gain the favor of the Gentiles. His opponents probably said Paul lacked the moral fiber and backbone to make the Gentiles toe the mark. They thought they saw in Paul what they often found in themselves - seeking the favor of men, rather than of God. They mistook grace for weakness. (If dogmatism is taking a hard stand on an issue, then what they accused Paul of was "cat-matism" - just pussy-footing around!) Whatever the case, Paul is clearly seen here as a man taking a firm stand on an unpopular issue.

Or Of God? - There is a dramatic difference between the attitude of false teachers (John 5:44) and the attitude of the apostles (Acts 5:29).

If I Were Still Pleasing Men - As Paul says in Phil. 3:4-6, he was at one time a very good lawkeeper. His rapid advancement, however, must have been at least partly due to seeking the praise of men. Popularity is strong wine. Just remember that the Lord said, "Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their father did to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26)

Not A Servant Of Christ - A large percentage of the ancient world was made up of slaves. Through war, poverty, or other misfortune they were forced into involuntary servitude. These people were:

- a. Owned by someone else.
- b. Compelled to do the will of their master.
- c. Deprived of all their rights.

It is a tremendous paradox that Paul should gladly use the very word "slave" (*doulos*) in this epistle of freedom in Christ. It seems folly to those who are perishing, but the only real freedom is in freely chosen servanthood, and the only real victory is in surrender. Jesus himself proved the path of servanthood (Phil. 2:5-8) and Paul willingly followed.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. What is an apostle?
2. What word begins and ends each of Paul's epistles, and why is it so important in Galatians?
3. How would you explain the meaning of each of the terms in "Lord Jesus Christ"?
4. How can it be of any value for Jesus to have died for other people's sins?
5. Why was Paul so astonished at the Galatians?
6. Why is it a perversion of the gospel to add just a little bit of legalism?

7. What do you do or say when you hear someone distorting the truth of the gospel?
8. Is it possible to please both men and God? (Read Luke 2:52) Where do you draw the line?
9. What does it mean to be a slave of Christ?

ABA REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul omit words of thanksgiving and commendation from his opening of this epistle?
2. “Saul” is a _____ name, and “Paul” is a _____ name.
3. What is the Greek word for “apostle,” what does it mean, and how was it used in the New Testament?
4. Why was it so important for Paul to address the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?
5. The term “Galatia” probably refers to what area and which cities?
6. Why would Paul open and close all of his 13 epistles with a note of grace?
7. What is the Greek word for “grace,” and what does grace mean?
8. What does “peace” mean, and what is its connection to the word “shalom”?
9. What is significant about Paul opening his epistles with a Greek-Jewish greeting?
10. How was the title “Lord” used in Greek?
11. What is the connection between the names Jesus and Joshua?
12. What is the connection between “Christ” and “Messiah”?

13. What is the meaning of the Greek word for “deliver,” and how was this word used in the book of Acts?
14. Compare Gal.1:4 and 2 Peter 3:9, and discuss what is the will of God.
15. Discuss the word “glory” and how it is used in Galatians.
16. Explain what caused Paul to become astonished over the Galatians.
17. Explain how the distinct Greek words “heteros” and “allos” clarify the true meaning of Gal. 1:6-7?
18. In Gal. 1:7, what does the word “pervert” imply?
19. Did any of the Apostles or an angel from heaven have the authority to change the Gospel of Christ?
20. How could Gal 1:7-8 be used to teach someone who believed an angel had the authority to deliver a new teaching and message of salvation?
21. Explain the word “accursed” and how it was used in reference to Jericho?
22. What is the difference between the warnings of Gal. 1:8 and 1:9?
23. “With reference to the _____ it has well been said, ‘If it’s _____ its not _____. If it’s _____, it’s not _____.’”
24. What could cause the Galatians to accuse Paul of seeking the favor of men?
25. What is the Greek word for “slave”?