

CONCERNING THE WAY

October 9, 2012

LESSON 143: PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS



Galatians 1:1-2 From: Paul—an apostle not sent from men or by a man, but by Jesus the Messiah, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— (2) and all the brothers who are with me. To: The churches in Galatia.

- The apostle Paul wrote this letter sometime between the years 53-56 A.D. to the believers in Galatia, which was not a city but a Roman province located in what is now north-central and northeastern Turkey.
- Right off he lets you know that he is an apostle, a position of authority given to him not by men, but directly by God the Father and God the Son. This is an outrageous claim, but it is true. He claimed that he was equal to the original Twelve, and they accepted him as one of them. This statement right in the greeting gives us a preview of one of the reasons Paul is writing this letter.
- Paul doesn't mention the specific churches he is writing to, but this letter was probably passed around from church to church in the cities Paul visited on his first missionary journey (Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) and unknown churches he visited on his 2nd journey in Galatia proper.
- "All the brothers with me" - These were Paul's fellow workers, probably Barnabas as well as the prophets and teachers that Paul ministered with in Antioch (see Acts 13:1).



Galatians 1:3-5 May grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah, be yours! (4) He gave himself for our sins in order to rescue us from this present evil age according to the will of our God and Father. (5) To him be the glory

forever and ever! Amen.

- The traditional Greek and Hebrew forms of greeting, grace and peace, were always used by Paul in his letters. Wouldn't it be nice to greet each other that way instead of "Hi, how ya doin'?"
- Paul never passed up a chance to give out the gospel, which is another good example for us. We see in verse 4 that Christ's death was voluntary and the purpose was for our sins. Look at the reason He did that – "to rescue us from this present evil age". We don't often think of salvation in that way, but the gospel **frees** us. We think of it as keeping us from eternal judgment to come, and that is certainly true, but Christ also delivers believing sinners from the power of the world system (under the influence of Satan) and transfers us to the eternal Kingdom of God. We have victory over the power of Satan right now because we are in Christ. And we bring glory to God because of Christ's redeeming work on the cross.

Galatians 1:6-7 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of the Messiah and, instead, are following a different gospel, (7) not that another one really exists. To be sure, there are certain people who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel about the Messiah.

- Paul normally begins a letter by expressing gratitude for the people in the church he's writing to. But he has a bone to pick with the churches of Galatia, and he gets right to the point. Even the Corinthians, whom Paul wrote to correct their moral failures, got some praise from him at the beginning of his letter. This shows us how serious false theology or doctrine can be. Many people don't consider theology to be important, but bad doctrine can lead down many dangerous roads.
- "A different gospel" – as you can see by what Paul said, this is not a legitimate gospel, not just the gospel with minor variations, but completely opposite to the true one. Paul is shocked that they are turning away from the gospel, from God Himself, so quickly after he had last visited them. This shows how fast a body of believers can be deceived by false teachers.
- What was this "different gospel"? The clue is in verse 6 – "deserting the one who called you by the grace of the Messiah". The Galatians had rejected the gospel of grace and gone back to thinking they had to obey the Law of Moses. Today we call this "legalism" and it is still present in some churches and denominations. Paul is saying 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 is actually perverting the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:8-9 But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that person be condemned! (9) What we have told you in the past I am now telling you again: If anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that person be condemned!

- Paul is giving a hypothetical situation here, but it has actually happened. You could say that this is what happened to cause the creation of both Mormonism and Islam. Joseph Smith and Mohammed both claimed to be visited by an angel that told them certain things. The problem is that the gospel these angels taught these men (if they were truly angels then they were fallen, but most likely their false teachings came from their own vain imaginations), were different gospels than the one taught by Paul and the rest of the apostles, the true gospel of Christ.
- If anybody were preaching a different gospel (which the false teachers were), he would come under God's eternal judgment. Paul is speaking so strongly because the Judaizers were challenging the importance of the Cross. If works are necessary for salvation, then the work of Christ was not sufficient. So you can see how

important this is. When the gospel message is corrupted, the way of salvation is confused and people are in danger of being eternally lost.

Galatians 1:10 Am I now trying to win the approval of people or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be the Messiah's servant.

- Apparently the false teachers had accused Paul of preaching a cheap way of getting to heaven (freedom from the Law) to get people to like him. But if Paul was trying to win the approval of people he would have stayed a Pharisee and continued to preach the Law, not become the servant of the Messiah.

Galatians 1:11-12 For I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin. (12) For I did not receive it from a man, nor was I taught it, but it was revealed to me by Jesus the Messiah.

- This is what sets true Christianity apart from all other religions. All man-made religions teach that to be saved you have to do good works and prove yourself worthy to be saved. Paul claims he was taught the gospel from the highest authority – not from any man or even the 12 apostles, but from Jesus Christ himself.
- The word “gospel” in English and Greek means “good news”, not “good works” or “good advice”!

Galatians 1:13-14 For you have heard about my earlier life in Judaism—how I kept violently persecuting God's church and was trying to destroy it. (14) I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries, because I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.

- Now Paul gives us a little of his personal history, which we also read about in the book of Acts (Acts 26:9-11), to defend his authority and his claim that he did not receive this gospel from any man but from God.

Galatians 1:15-18 But when God, who set me apart before I was born and who called me by his grace, was pleased (16) to reveal his Son to me so that I might proclaim him among the gentiles, I did not confer with another human being at any time, (17) nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me. Instead, I went away to Arabia and then came back to Damascus. (18) Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days.

- You can read about how God miraculously intervened in Paul's life in Acts 9. God reveals Himself to people in different ways, but Most of us don't get introduced to Jesus in quite so spectacular a way as Paul did.
- This verse is a strong witness of God's sovereignty and election. God predestined Paul and called him before he was born. It had nothing to do with him, but totally God's choice (see Romans 8:30). Paul responded to this call when he met Jesus face to face on the road to Damascus.
- Even someone who was as intelligent as Paul, who knew the scriptures as well as anyone, spent three years, most likely in study and training, before he was ready to begin his ministry. Since the twelve disciples spent three years with Jesus before they were ready to go out on their own in ministry, it is assumed that this three year period for Paul was time spent with Jesus being taught the gospel and all

the Christian doctrine that we find in his letters. What do you think he studied while he was in Arabia?

- The purpose of this revelation given to Paul was to preach Christ among the Gentiles. He became known as the apostle to the Gentiles, and you can see his work described in the book of Acts (Acts 9:15; 13:46-47; 26:20; also Romans 11:13; 15:16; Ephesians 3:8; 1 Timothy 2:7)
- So Paul is arguing he did not receive his message from men before or at the time of his conversion to following Christ. And now he's saying he didn't consult anyone afterwards, either. He could have immediately gone to Jerusalem to be taught by the apostles, but he didn't. He formed his theology independently by studying the Old Testament scriptures under the guidance of Christ Himself.

Galatians 1:19-24 **But I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother. (20) (Before God, what I'm writing to you is the truth.) (21) Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. (22) But the churches of the Messiah that are in Judea did not yet know me personally. (23) The only thing they kept hearing was this: "The man who used to persecute us is now proclaiming the faith he once tried to destroy!" (24) So they kept glorifying God for what had happened to me.**

- When he came back after the three year period, he spent two weeks with Peter to get to know him, and also James the brother of Jesus. This was probably more for these men's benefit than Paul, because they didn't really know much about him since his conversion. Peter and James were able to speak with Paul and see where his heart was at, and hear his passion for the gospel and reaching the Gentiles.
- You can read about this visit to Jerusalem by Paul in Acts 9:26-30. The apostles were afraid of him at first; because they weren't sure his conversion was real. But after they got to know him and saw him speak out boldly for Christ, they were convinced.

Chapter 2

In this chapter Paul continues his defense of his apostolic authority and the gospel he preached. Now he's going to talk about the content of his message, as well as the fact that, although he was independent from the other apostles, there was a basic unity between them.

Galatians 2:1-2 **Then fourteen years later I again went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus with me. (2) I went in response to a revelation, and in a private meeting with the reputed leaders, I explained to them the gospel that I'm proclaiming to the gentiles. I did this because I was afraid that I was running or had run my life's race for nothing.**

- The book of Acts mentions five different times Paul visited Jerusalem after his conversion:
 - (1) the visit after he left Damascus (Acts 9:26-30; Galatians 1:18-20);
 - (2) the famine visit (Acts 11:27-30);
 - (3) the visit to attend the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-30);
 - (4) the visit at the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:22);
 - (5) the last visit which ended in Paul's arrest and imprisonment (Acts 21:15-23:35).
- Most scholars believe Paul was speaking either of his famine visit or the Council visit, but the 2nd visit makes the most sense in context of what Paul was saying. The revelation he went in response to may have been the famine and the need to raise money to help.

- Paul took this opportunity to speak with the other apostles privately about the message he was preaching to the Gentiles. This does not mean Paul was trying to get their approval of its truth and accuracy, because he had received the gospel from God by revelation. But he wanted them to see that his message did not conflict with the gospel they were proclaiming.

Galatians 2:3-5 But not even Titus, who was with me, was forced to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. (4) However, false brothers were secretly brought in. They slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in the Messiah Jesus so that they might enslave us. (5) But we did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.

- It looks like Paul brought Titus with him, a Gentile brother, to test how his gospel of grace would be received by the “reputed leaders” in Jerusalem. If those leaders would have tried to force Titus to be circumcised, then Paul would have known he was going to have a problem getting his message to be accepted, and much of his work for the last fourteen years could have been undone.
- But there were spies there (the Greek meaning here is “sneaked in alongside”). These guys were not the apostles, but men called “Judaizers” (Paul calls them “false brothers”) who claimed to be followers of Christ, but whose goal was to rob new Christians of their freedom in Christ, to make them observe the rules and ceremonies of the Law of Moses. They must have insisted that Titus be circumcised or they said he could not be saved. But Paul did not give in to them, knowing that if he forced Titus to be circumcised it would deny the gospel he was preaching, that salvation is by faith alone.

Galatians 2:6 Now those who were reputed to be important added nothing to my message. (What sort of people they were makes no difference to me, since God pays no attention to outward appearances.)

- Paul describes the leaders and apostles in Jerusalem again in what seems to be a disrespectful way, but I think he was saying that because these false brothers probably made the leaders out to be much more important than they themselves would have thought of themselves, and treated Paul as if he were nothing. But Paul was not awed by apostles such as Peter, James, and John, and was accepted by them as an equal.
- But his point is that the leaders added nothing to his message that he wasn’t already proclaiming. They did not correct him or try to change anything he was preaching, but confirmed the truth and completeness of his message.

Galatians 2:7-8 In fact, they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised. (8) For the one who worked through Peter by making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me by sending me to the gentiles.

- The other apostles saw that Paul had been commissioned by God to preach the gospel to the Gentiles, just like Peter had been commissioned by God to preach the gospel to the Jews. This in no way means there are two different gospels. It is the same gospel, preached by two different apostles to two distinct groups of people.
- Notice how Paul calls Peter “Cephas” sometimes and “Peter” other times. Both mean “rock”, but

“Peter” is Greek and “Cephas” is Aramaic. Simon was his original name but Jesus changed it (in John 1:42).

Galatians 2:9-10 So when James, Cephas, and John (who were reputed to be leaders) recognized the grace that had been given me, they gave Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised. (10) The only thing they asked us to do was to remember the destitute, the very thing I was eager to do.

- So the only thing the Jerusalem leaders asked Paul to do was remember the poor, which he already had a passion for. That is probably what brought him to Jerusalem in the first place, to seek help for the people who were left desolate by the famine (Acts 11:29-30). On his 3rd missionary journey he raised a lot of money to help needy Christians in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1-3).

Galatians 2:11-14 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly wrong. (12) Until some men arrived from James, he was in the habit of eating with the gentiles, but after those men came, he withdrew from the gentiles and would not associate with them any longer, because he was afraid of the circumcision party. (13) The other Jews also joined him in this hypocritical behavior, to the extent that even Barnabas was caught up in their hypocrisy. (14) But when I saw that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, "Though you are a Jew, you have been living like a gentile and not like a Jew. So how can you insist that the gentiles must live like Jews?"

- This is the last historical event Paul talks about in this letter. He saw Peter doing something hypocritical and called him on it. Why do you think Peter did this? (read verse 12 again)
- Paul was right to rebuke him about it, because what he did was wrong. But why did he write about it in this letter? (Think of the context here – what Paul’s main point has been).
- Peter, the other Jewish Christians, and Barnabas—were guilty of hypocrisy because while teaching and talking about being one in Christ with Gentiles, they were denying this truth by how they acted.
- This shows us that a great Christian leader like Peter was not perfect, he still sinned. This is a great comfort for us, but it also shows that Peter could never have been a “pope” as the Catholic Church claims. He was not and never was infallible.
- Paul doesn’t say what Peter’s response was. He probably did not say anything. There was nothing he could say, Paul was absolutely right. We are guilty of this whenever we act against our true convictions because we are afraid of being ridiculed or looked down on.

Galatians 2:15-16 We ourselves are Jews by birth, and not gentile sinners, (16) yet we know that a person is not justified by doing what the Law requires, but rather by the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. We, too, have believed in the Messiah Jesus so that we might be justified by the faithfulness of the Messiah and not by doing what the Law requires, for no human being will be justified by doing what the Law requires.

- Paul transitions from that story into beginning his defense of the doctrine of justification by faith. Verse 16 is one of the most important verses in the entire letter. It’s the first time the word “justified” is

used. It is a legal term, which means “to declare righteous”. The opposite of being justified is to be condemned.

- So Paul is declaring very clearly that we are not justified by obeying the law, but by what?
- Some people argue that James contradicts Paul about this, saying that Abraham was “justified by works” (James 2:21-25). But he was not justified by works of the Law. The Mosaic Law did not even exist at the time of Abraham, and even James says in James 2:23 that Abraham was justified by faith. And James also says in James 2:10 that no one can keep the law completely. There is no contradiction. James is just saying that faith and works go hand in hand. We are justified by faith alone, but true saving faith always results in good works. That is how we show that we have true faith.

Galatians 2:17-18 Now if we, while trying to be justified by the Messiah, have been found to be sinners, does that mean that the Messiah is serving the interests of sin? Of course not! (18) For if I rebuild something that I tore down, I demonstrate that I am a wrongdoer.

- The incident that Paul just related is a good example of this. Peter, who supposedly was justified by Christ, was found to be a sinner. Does that mean Christ is promoting sin? No way. At that point Peter just needed to confess his sin and move on, trusting in his justification in Christ, which had never changed. But if he had returned to trying to obey the Law to justify himself (verse 18), all it does is just keep showing that he is a lawbreaker, a sinner. That’s what the Law does.

Galatians 2:19-21 For through the Law I died to the Law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with the Messiah. (20) I no longer live, but the Messiah lives in me, and the life that I am now living in this body I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (21) I do not misapply God's grace, for if righteousness comes about by doing what the Law requires, then the Messiah died for nothing.

- This is the secret to a Christ-honoring Christian life! As Paul said in Romans 6:11, “Consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” What we believe makes all the difference.
- The Law demands death for those who break it, but Christ took that punishment for us, he paid that death penalty for us once for all time.
- So, speaking in the first person like Paul - the Law killed Christ, and since I am joined to Christ, it killed me, I was crucified with Him spiritually.
- So I died, and now I live through Christ, and I am able to “live for God” because Christ lives in me. It caused a change in me: the old me is dead. The self-righteous, self-centered me died. I’ve yielded the throne of my life to Christ. But it is not in my own strength that I am able to live the Christian life; the living Christ Himself made His home in my heart: Christ lives in me.
- Yet Christ does not operate automatically in a believer’s life; it is a matter of living the new life by faith in the Son of God. So it is faith and not works or legal obedience that releases divine power to live a Christian life. Basically Paul is saying, “If He loved me enough to give Himself for me, then He loves me enough to live out His life in me.”
- You can’t understand this unless you understand our union with Christ. When we accept Christ, we are baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ and into His body, the church, all the other believers (Romans 6:1-6 and 1 Corinthians 12:13). Having been united to Christ in this way, we now share in his death, burial, and resurrection.