



The
PILLAR OF
TRUTH
SERIES

Galatians and Ephesians

A STUDY WORKBOOK

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Galatians
Study Workbook
“Pillar of Truth” Series

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Introduction to Galatians

The Epistle to the Galatians was not written to any one congregation, but to a group of churches in a region called Galatia. There has been some controversy as to whether “Galatia” refers to the cultural region of Galatia (which was originally settled hundreds of years before Christ by Gauls from the north) or the Roman political province of Galatia. In either case, Galatia was located in the middle of the Anatolian Peninsula (or central modern-day Turkey). This region was bordered by Phrygia, Pontus, Bithynia, and Cappadocia. It is generally agreed that Paul wrote *at least* to the churches in the southern portion of that area—specifically, those churches which he and Barnabas had established on their first missionary journey. This would include the churches in Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 14:1-28, 16:6, 18:23). While some scholars propose that Paul wrote to northern Galatia (thus, the cities of Pessinus, Ancyra, and Tavium), there is nothing in Acts or other New Testament writings to prove Paul ever preached in that area. It stands to reason that Paul would write to the churches in Galatia that are known to us rather than to assume otherwise.¹

Galatians is likely one of the first—if not *the* first—of the letters written by Paul (that we know of) that was circulated among the early churches. It is thought to have been written around AD 50-51, shortly after the council in Jerusalem (Acts 15). It may have been written from Corinth during Paul’s second missionary journey, though some believe it was written while he was in Antioch, immediately after the council. Galatians is often called “little Romans,” since the main theses in Galatians are repeated and expounded upon extensively in that larger treatise. Galatians was a favorite book of the European Reformers (16 – 17th centuries)—and especially of Martin Luther. These men saw a great similarity between Paul’s confrontation with Judaists and their own confrontation between their beliefs and the oppressive doctrines of the Roman (Catholic) Church. William Ramsay calls Galatians “the most remarkable letter that ever was written.”²

Paul’s authorship of this letter has never been seriously doubted. In fact, many have said that Galatians is the most Pauline composition one could imagine. Ramsay calls it “the most remarkable and the most intensely individual of the Pauline Epistles.”³ The opening salutation (1:1), the first-person reference to the Jerusalem council and meetings with Peter and James (2:1-10), and allusions to the writer as being the apostle of the Gentiles, are unmistakably Pauline (compare with Romans 15:15-19). This is supported by testimonies of the early church “fathers” and writers, which unanimously upheld Paul as the author of this epistle.⁴ “No breath of suspicion as to the authorship, integrity or apostolic authority of the Epistle to the Galatians has reached us from ancient times.”⁵

¹ Nearly every commentator grapples with the “Who were the Galatians?” question, and the conclusion is nearly split on whether it refers to Northern or Southern Galatia. This study maintains that Paul wrote exclusively to churches in the Southern Galatian region, following the argument put forward by R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians, etc.* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 8-12.

² William Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 85.

³ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴ Jamieson, Robert, Andrew Fausset and David Brown, *New Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Testament Volume* (D. Douglas, gen. ed.; revised by Dr. Philip W. Comfort; © 2009 QuickVerse for Windows), on “Introduction.”

⁵ George G. Findlay, “Galatians, Epistle to,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1939), 1156.

Purpose and Theme

The central issue which Paul addresses in Galatians is that Judaism cannot be imposed upon Gentile converts to Christianity. A Judaist—a term used in nearly any study of Galatians—refers to one who strictly imposed the Law of Moses, especially in the context of proselytes.⁶ Judaism typically went well beyond the Law of Moses, however, for it married together the Law given to Israel at Sinai with long-held rabbinical traditions. The Judaist believed that these traditions were as authoritative as the Law itself—an erroneous belief that Jesus Himself brought to their attention (Matthew 15:1-6, Mark 7:5-13). As Judaists became Christians, they sometimes brought with them their proud heritage, deep-seated reverence for the Law, and self-righteousness based upon law-keeping rather than divine grace. Thus, some Jews who had believed were insistent that the Law be compulsory for new converts (Acts 15:5). If this ideology/theology was true, then the following would also be true:

- ❑ The Law of Moses is still binding as a legal imposition upon all believers.
- ❑ The Law is just as important and necessary as the gospel.
- ❑ All Gentiles who become disciples of Christ would also have to become disciples of Moses (as the Judaists proudly considered themselves; see John 9:27-28).
- ❑ Just as Gentile converts to Judaism were considered (in essence) second-class citizens—since they could never be *Jews*—so Gentile converts to Christ are still regarded as inferior to Jewish Christians.
- ❑ This would impose a two-tier system within the church—which would conflict with the unifying and barrier-removing work of Christ (see Ephesians 2:13-18).
- ❑ All the work that Paul (and others) had done among the Gentiles would be compromised by these facts; many Gentiles might abandon the gospel by mistakenly seeing it as just another brand of Jewish religion.
- ❑ Paul (and fellow ministers to the Gentiles) would be regarded as not only opponents of (the Law of) Moses, but also as having taught Gentile believers only *part* of the gospel of Christ.
- ❑ Paul's authority and authenticity as an apostle of Christ would be irreparably damaged, and he would lose all credibility *as* an apostle among both Jews and Gentiles.
- ❑ The Judaizers—and not Christ's hand-picked apostles—would be recognized as the leading authorities in the churches, and would be free to teach Judaism alongside the teaching of Christ.

These are the serious doctrinal issues that prompted the so-called council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). They also help us to understand why Paul himself so aggressively resisted the Judaizing teachers in that council as well as in his missionary efforts and his epistles to various churches. Paul understood this contest as a major turning point for the church; its outcome would forever determine the effectiveness of the gospel among the non-Jewish world. (It is important to note that not *all* believing Jews shared the views of Judaists.)

⁶“Circumcision” meant more than the mere cutting of the flesh, but often encompassed the Judaic belief system. Thus, when Paul refers to circumcision as a religious practice (as in 5:3), he means the Law of Moses; “A man placed himself under the entire Mosaic system by submitting to circumcision” (Lenski, 254). But a number of commentators believe that only circumcision (and perhaps a few other ordinances, such as Sabbath-keeping, diet, etc.) was the full objective of the Judaizers (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, etc.* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995], 19). Incidentally, “Judaists” and “Judaizers” mean the same thing and can be used interchangeably. “The term [Judaizer] is derived from a coined Latin word *Iudaizo* meaning ‘to be or live like a Jew.’ It is a religious designation rather than a national description” (L. M. Petersen, “Galatians, Epistle to,” *The Zondervan Biblical Encyclopedia* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 631). That author also refers to Judaizers as “Old Testament Christians,” which is an interesting way of characterizing these men.

The Judaists did not see themselves as the enemy of the gospel, however. They saw themselves, in essence, as the genuine keepers of that which was sacred to God. They would not accept the fact that God would (in their minds) *abandon* the Law of Moses for another means of salvation. More specifically, they struggled to comprehend—or outright resisted—the idea that a person could be saved by grace *apart from* keeping the sacred commandments given to Israel on Mount Sinai.⁷ Such beliefs, which were fanned by human pride and Jewish nationalism, prevented many Jews from becoming Christians; and some of those who *did* convert to Christianity refused to let go of these views. To them, the only way to be *truly* justified before God was through law-keeping. In effect, Christianity was merely a stepping stone; Judaism was the ultimate objective.

While these Judaizing teachers may have made a convincing argument to some—including the Galatian converts themselves—Paul saw their seemingly pious stance as arrogant and heretical. It was impossible, he maintained, to have *ever* been justified by works (of law); God has *always* saved men by divine grace imparted as His response to genuine human faith. In other words, the Judaists were not only wrong to marry Judaism with the gospel of Christ, but they have been wrong about law-keeping all along (see Romans 10:1-4). Sin is a spiritual problem, not a physical one; spiritual problems cannot be rectified by physical performance or human effort. Law-keeping *at best* is an act of faith, not an act of self-justification. Likewise, a person's soul cannot be healed by "works of law" *on par with* divine intervention (3:3). Either a person is saved by divine grace, or he is saved by perfect, flawless law-keeping; but once he has sinned against the law, he is no longer a law-keeper, but a law-breaker. No law-breaker, then, is able to redeem himself in his own corrupted state of being. By choosing to be justified by law—whether the Law of Moses or any self-imposed works of human effort—a person nullifies the power of God's saving grace for himself (5:2-4).

The Judaists had considerable sway over the Gentiles, however. Paul called this influence a kind of "bewitching"—not a factual or wholesome kind of persuasion, but one which implied a self-serving and sinister agenda (3:1). Apparently the Galatians were fond of mystic religion (of the Mother-Goddess Cybele, in neighboring Phrygia) and thus believed that "the full privileges of Christianity could only be attained through an elaborate system of ceremonial symbolism"—namely, circumcision and the other rites of the Law of Moses.⁸ In other words, the Judaizing teachers appealed to their sense of resting upon human *performance* as a means of achieving spiritual wisdom and moral righteousness. They may have also heard that Paul seemed a supporter of the Law when he was with Jews, but appeared to renounce it when with Gentiles. The persuasion of the Judaizing teachers, then, was to portray Paul as a false representative of the gospel of Christ: he did not accurately teach the Jerusalem apostles' version of the gospel, but his own; he purposely denied Gentiles their right to enjoy what Jewish Christians enjoyed (even though they did not see the ulterior motives involved); and he was a flatterer and a renegade teacher, not a genuine apostle.

These insinuations—and the serious damage that they presented to Paul's credibility and ministry among the Gentiles—had to be immediately refuted. This explains the blunt and reproving tone of much of this epistle. "He wrote to the Galatians an Epistle which begins with an abruptness and severity showing his sense of the urgency of the occasion, and the greatness of the danger. It is also frequently characterised [*sic*] by a tone of sadness, such as would naturally be felt by a man of such warm affections when he heard that those whom he loved were forsaking his cause and believing the calumnies of his enemies."⁹ It was the Judaists who were falsely representing the gospel,

⁷ This is the meaning of "apart from law" statements in Paul's letters; see Romans 3:21, 28, for example.

⁸ JFB, on "Introduction"; Hendriksen, 5; and Ramsay, 330.

⁹ W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson, *The Life and Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964), 478.

not Paul; it was they who denied Gentiles the full rights and privileges of the gospel, not Paul; and it was they who enslaved these people to their self-serving brand of Christianity, not Paul. In several times throughout the epistle, Paul expresses his amazement, perplexity, and sheer disappointment with the Galatian converts (1:6, 3:1, 4:11, 5:7, et al). The Judaists privately believed that it was beneath them to lower themselves to the spiritual plane of Gentiles; they would allow Gentiles to ascend to their level, but even so they [Jews] would always maintain the upper hand. In sharp contrast, Paul argues the equalizing effect of both sin *and* the gospel: just as all men—Jews and Gentiles—are condemned because of sin, so all men are saved by Christ. Those who are saved are *equals* “in Christ”; from heaven’s perspective, there are no distinctions between Jews and Gentiles, masters and servants, or male and female (3:28). “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus” (3:26)—there is no two-party, two-tier, or clergy-laity system in the Lord’s church. Perfection and freedom, then, are not obtained by works of law, but through faith in Christ (1:3-4, 3:3, 5:1).

Galatians is comprised of three general sets of arguments that refute the false charges of the Judaists *and* clarify the true teaching of the gospel. The first set of arguments deals with his apostolic authority (chapters 1 – 2): the gospel Paul preached did not come from men (or the twelve apostles), but he received it from God directly by way of divine revelation (1:10-12). The second set of arguments deal with accusations concerning Paul’s alleged flip-flop position on the Law of Moses (chapters 3 – 4): the Law was a tutor designed to lead Jews to the gospel of Christ, and was never meant to be permanent (3:24). Christ is the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, not the Law. The third set of arguments responds to allegations that Paul was leading the Galatians down his own path rather than closer to God (chapters 5 – 6): Christians are led by the Spirit, not by men (5:16); they are justified by faith in God, not by works of law (or, human effort). This Spirit-led life will be evidenced by “fruit” which is consistent with the nature of God—not physical manifestations (such as circumcision, ceremonial rites, etc.).

Given the fact that much of the Epistle to the Galatians deals with a contest between Judaism and genuine Christianity, the contemporary Christian might be left with the impression that this letter is outdated and irrelevant. Such conclusions, however, are entirely inaccurate and untrue. It is far more accurate to say that Galatians deals with the most persistent and relevant issues of all—namely, the means by which sinful men are justified in the sight of a Righteous God. Instead of being archaic or “ancient history,” Galatians outlines the basic concerns of people and their relationship with God. It addresses the fallacy that human effort can duplicate or replace divine redemption (grace). It also puts the emphasis on Christ and *His* work rather than Christians and *their* work(s). These are issues with which people within the church continue to struggle even today. Some of the highlights of this letter include:

- ❑ Left to themselves, people gravitate from truth to fallacy (1:6-9).
- ❑ Human souls are justified by grace in God, not works of men (2:11-21).
- ❑ Christ’s atonement is sufficient for all of mankind’s sins (2:15-16).
- ❑ God has revealed His gospel to those whom He chose for this purpose (2:6, 10).
- ❑ The gospel expounds upon the relationship between legal requirements of law and spiritual freedom (2:17-21).

- ❑ The gospel provides a proper context and understanding of God's covenant with Israel and the Law of Moses (3:15-18, 4:21-31).
- ❑ All men and women are—as children of God—equal “in Christ” (3:27-29).
- ❑ Christ's church is united through “faith working through love,” not people working their way to self-justification (5:1-6).
- ❑ The Holy Spirit is the guiding force within Christians, not the imposition of laws, rites, or ceremonial distinctions (5:16, 25).
- ❑ Christians are not in competition with each other, but are to help and restore one another as needed (5:26, 6:1-2).

General Outline

- ❑ **Section One: Paul Defends His Authority (1:1 – 2:21)**
 - Paul's Rebuke of the Galatians' Fickleness (1:1-10)
 - Paul's Personal History and Credentials (1:11-24)
 - Paul in Jerusalem (2:1-10)
 - Paul's Confrontation with Peter (2:11-21)
- ❑ **Section Two: Salvation by Grace vs. Justified by Law (3:1 – 4:31)**
 - The True “Children of Abraham” (3:1-14)
 - The Purpose of the Law (3:15-29)
 - Paul's Personal Appeal to the Galatians (4:1-20)
 - The Allegory of Two Women (4:21-31)
- ❑ **Section Three: Led by the Spirit versus Living by the Flesh (5:1 – 6:10)**
 - Freedom is Found in Christ, Not in Law (5:1-15)
 - Contrast of the Two Lifestyles (5:16-26)
 - Expectations for Those Led by the Spirit (6:1-10)
- ❑ **Section Four: Concluding Remarks (6:11-18)**

≡ Lesson One ≡

Section One: Paul Defends His Authority (1:1 — 2:21) Paul's Rebuke of the Galatians' Fickleness (1:1–10)

Paul, an apostle ..." (1:1)—Paul begins his epistle by unequivocally stating his authority. "Apostle" literally means "one sent, an envoy; ambassador."¹⁰ The One who "sent" Paul was not a man, nor any human agency; it was Jesus Christ *and* God Himself. As He raised Christ from the grave, so God has the power and authority to raise up a man like Paul as an apostle.¹¹ In other words, Paul is not some upstart, renegade, or rogue preacher who claims to have authority (but really does not). It is quite the opposite: he is a genuine apostle, commissioned by God Himself, and capable of defending his apostleship with revealed knowledge and miraculous signs (2 Corinthians 12:12). If his apostleship is genuine, then so is the gospel that he preaches. "And all the brethren who are with me" (1:2)—implying that a number of men and women outside of Galatia were convinced of his credentials.

"To the churches of Galatia" (1:2) indicates that the problems Paul will address in this epistle were not limited to one congregation, but had infected an entire region. Peter also addressed this group of churches in his general epistle (1 Peter 1:1). The absence of any personal or special words of commendation, which are present in nearly every other of Paul's epistles, is conspicuous. We get the sense that Paul is anxious—even as the letter is being literally penned—to get to the point as soon as possible. Yet Paul is also a very reverent believer, and thus chooses not to pass up an opportunity to express his adoration of Jesus Christ (1:3-5). This praise serves another purpose as well: the emphasis on what *Jesus* does for believers is paramount to whatever believers might do for Jesus. This seems to be purposely stated, inasmuch as the Judaizing teachers preached a gospel of human effort and works of law rather than a dependence upon the grace of God. The "present evil age," then, would refer not only to the world of the unconverted, but also alludes to those who pervert the gospel of Christ. "There is no deliverance from the evils of the world until we are delivered from our sins. Sin is the cause of the evil of the world."¹²

"I am amazed [or, "I marvel"]..." (1:6)—Paul responds with genuine perplexity toward the Galatians' seemingly whimsical behavior. God calls them, and they listen and respond; some man "calls" them, and they give him equal attention and devotion! "So quickly" means "in a short period of time," not necessarily immediately after Paul had left them. They had so quickly abandoned the doctrinal teachings of the gospel—a gospel of *grace*, not works and self-justification—and had patterned themselves after certain influential teachers. (The Greek verb tense here indicates ongoing action: "you are *continuing* to desert Him...").¹³ Access to the Father is not obtained through meritorious works of human effort, but through a holy calling by the grace of God (Ephesians 2:18, 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14). Grace can be understood as everything God does for the believer that *he cannot do for himself*, with regard to his salvation. Certainly human works are necessary to demonstrate human faith (James 2:14-26); but such works can never compare to or replace the work of divine grace.

¹⁰ *Thayer's Greek Definitions* [Strong's #652], electronic version (© 2009 QuickVerse).

¹¹ In John 10:18, Jesus said that He would raise Himself from the dead; in Romans 8:11, Paul claims that the Holy Spirit raised Jesus from the dead; here in Galatians 1:1, the Father raised His Son. All three assertions are correct, inasmuch as it was *God's power* that raised Jesus from the grave, and all three of the Godhead possess this power.

¹² David Lipscomb, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Second Corinthians and Galatians* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate Co., 1979), 188.

¹³ JFB, on 1:6.

“A different gospel” (1:6) means one that Paul did not deliver to them. The gospel that the Judaizing teachers preached to the Galatians certainly incorporated a number of similarities to that which Paul preached. Crucial differences, however, made their gospel *different*—i.e., not genuine; lacking authority; and filled with contradictions. “Which is really not another” (1:7)—i.e., another of the same kind; an equal and acceptable alternative. “Paul was saying that the Galatians had listened to a totally different gospel, though there is really no other gospel than the one he preached.”¹⁴ Theirs was not an acceptable alternative; it was a corruption of the only authentic revelation from God—and those who preached it were impostors, not apostles (see 2 Corinthians 11:13-14). Thus, A. T. Robertson concludes, “It is no ‘gospel’ (good news) at all, but a yoke of bondage to the law and the abolition of grace.”¹⁵ Such men are “disturbing” the Galatians by filling their heads with convoluted messages and contradictory teachings.¹⁶ These teachers had received no revelations from God, but acted as though they had; they were not interested in sound doctrine, but only with imposing their beliefs upon others (see 1 Timothy 6:3-5). “The gospel of Christ” means the full message of salvation by God through Jesus Christ. It is the *good news* of redemption which is not based upon the finite and fallible power of men, but the infinite and infallible power of God (Romans 1:16).

Paul is “amazed” at the gullibility of the Galatians, but he lays out one of the most strongly-worded curses in the New Testament upon the Judaizing teachers themselves. “But even if we, or an angel from heaven ...” (1:8)—i.e., while the gospel had come to the Galatians through Paul, he did not own the rights to it; this message was not his to amend or adjust according to his preferences. Likewise, not even the divinely-sent *heavenly* messengers could preach something different. The gospel is “of Christ”—it is not just *about* Him, but He *owns* it and has full authority *over* it. The one who dares to challenge that authority “is accursed”—lit., *anathema*, “a thing devoted to God without hope of being redeemed...; therefore, a person or thing doomed to destruction.”¹⁷ To preach a false gospel *as though it were from God* is a crime of the highest order, since it not only brings condemnation to the one who preaches it but also misleads an untold number of people who will accept it as the truth. (Think of Jesus’ strong condemnation of “stumbling blocks” in connection with this thought; see Matthew 18:4-7.) God cannot contradict Himself; Christ did not produce two equally-valid but contradictory messages of salvation; the Holy Spirit does not speak out of both sides of His mouth.

The Judaizing teachers gained their credentials from the Jewish leaders and (they assumed) the apostles in Jerusalem—the *crème de la crème* of all religious teachers. They asserted their “authority” over and against that of Paul; they imposed themselves upon those whom Paul had already led to Christ with the purity and simplicity of His gospel (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:3). Paul taught that the Galatians enjoyed freedom in Christ; the Judaizers compelled these people to keep the Law of Moses and its ceremonial rites. The misinformation and confusion caused by these illegitimate teachers could have devastating effects—not only for the Galatians themselves, but for all others who would follow suit. The matter had to be countered quickly and directly; thus Paul minces no words in condemning it. “So I now say again ...” (1:9)—the seriousness of this matter warrants repeating heaven’s denunciation of it. And if this *teaching* is so strongly denounced, then the *reception* of it is also perilous.

¹⁴ JFB, on 1:7.

¹⁵ A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House [no date]), 276.

¹⁶ William Hendriksen translates this (1:7), “...Certain individuals are throwing you into confusion” (40), which gives perhaps a clearer understanding than “disturbing you.”

¹⁷ *Thayer’s Greek Definitions* [Strong’s #G331]. The Old Testament phrase “under the ban” most closely identifies with the meaning here. Those things that were devoted to God in this way were to be completely destroyed, without mercy or relenting; see Deuteronomy 7:26, 13:17, Joshua 6:17-18, 7:15, et al.

Clearly Paul would not say such things if he was trying to please *men* rather than God (1:10). The Judaizers had accused Paul of being a flatterer of men in order to win their support; Paul plainly and bluntly refutes all such accusations. In essence, he says, “Why would I preach to you something that *I could not change* in order to gain popular approval? This does not make sense. You Galatians should be ashamed of yourselves for so quickly accepting such accusations against me.”¹⁸ The Jews were known to be men-pleasers, and especially the Pharisees (Luke 16:15, John 12:42-43). Paul states adamantly: “I am not one of them; I am not a servant of theirs; I am a servant of Christ and Christ alone.” “Bond-servant” (*doulos*) is translated elsewhere in the New Testament as “slave.” Depending on the context, this servitude (or slavery) is either voluntary or involuntary; a person either willingly accepts it or it is imposed upon him. In the present case, Paul freely accepts his servitude to Christ, at the expense of his own popularity.

Questions

- 1.) In light of the Galatian churches’ situation, why was it critical that Paul establish his authority as an apostle (1:1)? Is authority still an important issue in religion today, or has this been settled once and for all?

- 2.) What conditions must exist within a congregation in order for it to embrace a “different gospel” than what Paul preached (1:6-7)? What might be the motive(s) for following this “different gospel”?

- 3.) Paul says that anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to the one he has preached is “accursed” (1:8-9).
 - a. Why such strong language, especially if someone’s similar gospel is preached with all good intentions, as all such departures claim to be?
 - b. With respect to modern political correctness and religious sensitivities, should we continue to maintain such strong language toward this subject today? If not, why not? If so, will not this draw heavy criticism from non-Christian or denominational religious authorities?

- 4.) Based upon 1:10 (and whatever other passages you wish to cite), what does it mean to seek the favor of God (as opposed to seeking the favor of men)?

¹⁸ The insulting nature of the Galatians “so quickly” abandoning Paul (as well as his teaching) is similar to that which he addresses with the Corinthians. Some of those people had not only reneged on their support of Paul, but also did not stand up to defend Paul against the accusations made against him.

≡Lesson Two≡

Paul's Personal History and Credentials (1:11–24)

Paul's tone so far has been terse and blunt. As he begins to lay his own personal history before the Galatians, he relaxes this somewhat, appealing to them as "brethren" (1:11). The gospel that he preached to them "is not according to man"—that is, it did not originate with men, and it therefore supersedes human authority. Paul "received" the gospel—not only the message itself, but also the apostolic authority to declare it—"through a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:12). This latter phrase can mean "a revelation that *concerns* Christ" or "...that came directly *from* Christ"; in the present context, both meanings are equally valid (see 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, 11:23, 15:3, Ephesians 3:3, and 1 Thessalonians 4:15). The *conveyance* of this revelation is not disclosed. Certainly the revelation began with Paul's (Saul's) conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1ff). Thereafter, he would receive divine information on an as-needed basis (Acts 18:9-10, 23:11, 27:23-24, et al). But the core of this revelation seems to go far beyond such incidental disclosures.

"For you have heard..." (1:13-14)—no doubt from Paul himself, but also from Barnabas and Christians who traveled through those churches. The Judaizers prided themselves on their almost militant devotion to the Law and their heritage; yet Paul eclipsed all of his contemporaries. Among the Pharisaic circles, Paul was a rising star, having sat at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 22:3, 23:6, 26:5), and being groomed to be a great rabbi himself. While now he serves to build up the church, he once was a "persecutor and a violent aggressor" (1 Timothy 1:13)—and, at the time, proud of it. He did not simply try to discourage people from becoming Christians; he sought instead to destroy the church, believing that it stood in direct contradiction to the Law of Moses (Acts 22:4, 26:11, Philippians 3:4-6). The Greek phrase "for my ancestral traditions" refers specifically to those traditions of one's father, grandfather, etc., rather than to national ancestry. "Paul's father was a strict Pharisee and had trained his son to be even stricter. The [Greek] adjective makes the impression that this Pharisaism was a trait of long standing in the family. Its proudest and most militant member was Saul."¹⁹

"But ..." (1:15-16a)—through a life-changing, history-altering, road-to-Damascus epiphany, Paul's career track on becoming a great Pharisaic rabbi came to a screeching halt. God "set [Paul] apart from [his] mother's womb"—an expression meaning that his commission had been determined even before he was born. Yet it also refers to the path that God had allowed Paul to take in his life as a means of *preparing* him for this ministry. It might be said that as long as the church had been in the mind of God, so too was a man like Paul to proclaim it. In other words, while Paul thought he was being groomed to be a great rabbi, it was in fact God who was grooming him to be a great apostle. William Ramsay has excellent comments on this:

The choice of himself was the final execution of a design which had been long maturing in the purpose of God, and which was worked out step by step in the process of events. Already before his birth Paul had been chosen and set apart as the Apostle of the Gentiles; and, when the proper moment had arrived, the revelation took place, and the design of God was made consciously present in the mind and heart of man. It was not a sudden and incalculable choice of a human instrument. It was the consummation of a process of selection and preparation which had begun before the man was born, but of which he had at first been wholly unconscious—so unconscious that he had spent his energy in fighting vainly against its compelling

¹⁹ Lenski, 53.

power. Only in later time, as he reviewed his life, he could see the preparatory stages in the process, beginning before his birth; the purpose of God had matured its design by the selection through a long period of means useful to the ultimate end.²⁰

“Called me through His grace” indicates Paul’s humility toward his own position: he knows he did not deserve it; he knows he did not earn it; “but by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). God “revealed His Son in [Paul]” through the indwelling of His Spirit (Romans 8:9, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 1:29): the revelation was not only that of information and doctrine, but it was personal and deeply sacred. While the twelve apostles were predominantly (but not exclusively) occupied with their ministry to the Jews, God appointed Paul as a minister to the Gentiles (Colossians 1:25-28).²¹

Though a fellow apostle with the twelve, Paul “did not immediately consult” with them in Jerusalem—or with anyone else—concerning his calling (1:16a-17). Instead, Paul retreated into relative isolation and obscurity, and nothing factually is known about this time of his life. It is safe to say that during this time God revealed to him whatever was necessary in order to prepare him for the ministry to come; it is equally safe to say that Paul likely pored over the Old Testament Scriptures with a completely new perspective. But beyond this we can only speculate. Just as the twelve apostles needed time (three years) to prepare for their own ministries, Paul also needed time for preparation and reflection. “Arabia” is a broad and ambiguous description for a large region of desert and wilderness areas to the north, east, and south of Palestine. In ancient times, Arabia often referred to the Sinai Peninsula, but this region juts northward into the southern regions of Mesopotamia (a.k.a. the Fertile Crescent) to the east of Syria. If we piece together what Luke records of Paul’s early Christian history with what Paul also provides in Galatians, this is what appears to have happened:

- ❑ Paul was converted (ca. AD 35) in the several days between Christ’s appearance to him and his baptism in Damascus (Acts 9:1-19).
- ❑ Paul spent “many days” in Damascus thereafter, preaching and teaching that Jesus is the Son of God, and practicing his new-found faith (Acts 9:20-22).
- ❑ After the Jews in Damascus had formed a plot against Paul’s life, he escaped from that city and disappeared for awhile (Acts 9:23-25, 2 Corinthians 11:32-33).
- ❑ It appears that it was at this point Paul retreated into Arabia, both to contemplate his radical conversion and immerse himself in his studies and receive divine revelations (1:17). It is possible that at this time Paul received his vision of Paradise (2 Corinthians 12:1-4). It also seems reasonable to assume that the “Arabia” mentioned here refers to Syrian Arabia (because of its proximity to Damascus), rather than the Sinai Peninsula.
- ❑ After this time, Paul returned to Damascus—better trained and more prepared to deal with his ministry (Galatians 1:17).
- ❑ “Three years later”—likely calculated from the time from his conversion in Damascus—Paul “went up to Jerusalem.” Initially, he tried to fellowship with the church there, but they resisted him due to his past history. It was not until Barnabas “took hold” of Paul and personally introduced him to “the apostles” that

²⁰ Ramsay, 86.

²¹ Through the use of wordplay, Paul makes a solemn point here (1:15). “Pharisee” is derived from *perisha*, “a separated (one)”; yet God “separated” Paul to his apostolic ministry even before he was recognized as a Pharisee. Thus, God made him a kind of “separated one” (in 1:15, *pharush*) in a higher sense than is possible according to the Jewish rabbis (Lenski, 56).

these men—Paul, Peter (Cephas), and James²²—finally met each other (Acts 9:27). It was at that time that Paul spent “fifteen days” with Peter (Galatians 1:18-19). (It is assumed that the other apostles were on missionary missions elsewhere, just as Peter himself later pursued in Acts 9:32ff.)

- ❑ While he was in Jerusalem, Paul spent time reasoning and debating with the Judaists, and especially with the Hellenistic Jews—likely, Greek-speaking, foreign-born Jews (as opposed to the Judean Jews who were born and raised in Jerusalem and its environs). These latter Jews, unable to reason against or accept what Paul taught (as with Stephen; see Acts 6:9-10), formed a plot against Paul’s life, forcing him to leave Jerusalem.
- ❑ Paul then traveled northward into Syria, then westward into the Anatolian Peninsula into his own home region of Cilicia, and specifically to the city of Tarsus (Acts 9:30, Galatians 1:21).
- ❑ Paul remained in Tarsus for an indefinite period of time, until Barnabas sought him out for the work in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:22-26).
- ❑ Paul continued to work in Antioch until he and Barnabas were called by the Holy Spirit (ca. AD 49-50) to embark on their missionary journey that led to the founding of the Galatian churches (Acts 13:1-3).

Paul’s stay in Jerusalem was limited, although he was no stranger to the city. While he was well-known among the Jewish leaders, he remained a relative stranger to the Christians in Judea (1:22-23). His reputation had preceded him; his conversion to the very belief system that he so aggressively tried to destroy could not be suppressed. “And they were glorifying God because of me” (1:24)—ironically, those who did not know Paul accepted him and his conversion as authentic; yet the Christians in Galatia that had met him and benefited from his work among them doubted his credibility.

Questions

- 1.) Why do you suppose God chose a former Pharisee, a “blasphemer ... [and] a persecutor and a violent aggressor” toward the church (1 Tim 1:12-16) to be a leading spokesman for the gospel of grace? What does this tell us about the *scope* and *power* of grace itself?
- 2.) Since Paul was “set apart” before birth to proclaim the gospel (1:15), did this overrule Paul’s free will to make his own decision on the matter? Please explain.
- 3.) If Paul was called by Christ on the road to Damascus (see Acts 9:1-16), why did so many years go by before he actually began his apostleship in Antioch (1:15-24)? What practical lessons can we draw from this for ourselves?

²² James, “the Lord’s brother” (1:19), was not technically numbered with the twelve apostles, nor did he possess their power (2 Corinthians 12:12) or apostolic authority. He did, however, wield considerable influence among the Jews in Jerusalem (see Acts 15:13ff and 21:18ff), likely because of his flesh-and-blood relation with Jesus. Thus, “apostles” in this sense is used in a general sense, just as when Barnabas is called an “apostle” (Acts 14:14).

≡Lesson Three≡

Paul in Jerusalem (2:1–10)

Then after an interval of fourteen years ..." (2:1)—likely, Paul means here fourteen years since his conversion. Yet commentators are divided as to which trip to Jerusalem is meant here. In Acts 11:29-30, the Christians in Antioch took up a collection for the famine-stricken saints in Jerusalem, and this money was sent by way of Paul and Barnabas. Some believe Paul is referring to this trip. Yet that particular visit to Jerusalem seems short and (according to Luke) uneventful (see Acts 12:25); there is nothing linking the one to the other. Paul had not yet been "set apart" by the Holy Spirit for his ministry to the Gentiles abroad. The summit meeting in Jerusalem in Acts 15, however, seems much more plausible and relevant to Paul's discussion with the Galatians. The purpose for that meeting (or council) was to answer directly the question of whether or not to impose the Law of Moses upon Gentile converts; this is exactly the same scenario that Paul faces with the churches in Galatia. The meeting in Jerusalem would have put Paul in the spotlight, since he was a prominent preacher to the Gentiles; this same intense focus upon Paul and his actions is described in his letter to the Galatians. Paul went to Jerusalem "because of a revelation" (2:2); his participation in the council meeting would support this fact far more strongly than his conveyance of the funds from Antioch. It seems that the far greater weight of evidence links Acts 15 with Galatians 2. Until better evidence is brought to light, this study will continue with this conclusion.²³

This is the first (chronological) mention of Titus in the New Testament (2:1). (He is mentioned several times in the Second Corinthian epistle, but this was written years after Galatians.) Paul has nothing but good things to say about this man. The manner in which Paul uses him and relies upon him speaks a great deal concerning his respect for him. He later calls Titus "my partner and fellow worker" (2 Corinthians 8:23) and "my true child in a common faith" (Titus 1:4). Such references lead us to believe that Titus was directly converted by Paul, and it seems that he is among the "some others" that accompanied Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2).²⁴ Before meeting with the entire assembly that would comprise the council, Paul first met privately with the leaders, which specifically included Peter, John, and James (cf. 2:9). The purpose for that meeting was to make certain that they were all in agreement before bringing the matter to a larger (and far more aggressive) audience. Paul's "fear" was that his ministerial work among the Gentiles would be "in vain" (2:2); therefore, he takes precaution in dealing with this sensitive and volatile situation. Yet the point Paul presses with the Galatians is: his authority is *on par* with the Jerusalem leaders, not in competition with it.

Since Titus is not a Jew, he had not been circumcised; his presence in Jerusalem during the council there intentionally pushed the envelope regarding the debate over the Law (2:3). Instead of succumbing to the pressure to circumcise Titus, Paul adamantly resists: "But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour" (2:3)—"them" being Pharisaic Jews who insisted upon compulsory observance of the Law of Moses. Circumcising Titus

²³ Hendriksen (71-73) also offers a substantial and convincing argument in favor of this view. Instead of repeating his points here, you are encouraged to read them in his own work.

²⁴ Some believe the reason Titus is not mentioned in Acts is because he is Luke's brother, and Luke chose not to mention Titus for the same reason he may have chosen not to mention himself by name—likely, to avoid any accusations of self-promotion. William Ramsey and other commentators have found this to be a reasonable explanation (Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990], 293-294; F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964], 406; James Coffman, *Commentary on Acts* [Austin: Firm Foundation, 1977], 383; and others).

would have supported these Jews' position; it would have undermined the uniqueness of the gospel *and* would have made Gentiles subservient to the Jews. We should clarify here: these "false brethren" are not necessarily those Pharisaic Christians who were wrestling with the great transition from the Law to the gospel—i.e., "those who had believed" (Acts 15:5). Paul appears to refer to another group—an insidious handful of men who were *not* sincere Christians but portrayed themselves as such.²⁵ These men had been "secretly brought [into]" the council meeting to argue against Paul and Barnabas. Such men wanted to enslave the Gentiles with their own Law; this contradicted the message of freedom in Christ and "the truth of the gospel" (2:4).

Not only did Paul refuse to succumb to the impositions of these "false brethren," he also did not take orders from those who were genuine Christian leaders (2:6-10). These men had nothing on Paul; "For I consider myself not in the least inferior to the most eminent apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:5). His parenthetical statement ("what they were makes no difference to me...") is not meant to be sarcastic, but re-states what has been said. Paul received his gospel from God; therefore he did not require the approval of men to validate it. These leaders—which included Peter, John, and James—did not change Paul's gospel to the Gentiles, just as he did not change their gospel to the Jews.²⁶ Their messages were one and the same, although each party addressed a different ethnic group. The leaders in Jerusalem "recognized the grace" that had been given to Paul (i.e., the ministry with which God had commissioned him); Paul was not in competition with them, but they considered each other as equals. This is the essential point that Paul wants to communicate to the Galatians—in essence, "You keep hearing that I am not preaching the entire gospel; yet I am preaching the *same* gospel that is being preached in Jerusalem!" The "pillars" reference is consistent with what Paul has said elsewhere (as in 1 Corinthians 3:11): these men built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ, and supported His church with their own individual ministries.²⁷ These men extended to Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship"—much more than a mere handshake, this act symbolized full acceptance of the missionaries and pledged support for future endeavors as well. "They only asked us to remember the poor" (2:10)—likely, the poor in Jerusalem. This was the only request made of Paul, even though he was already in agreement with it (see Acts 20:35, 2 Corinthians 8:9-15, et al).

Questions

- 1.) Why did Paul circumcise Timothy (Acts 16:1-3) but not Titus (2:3)? Is Paul concerned about literal circumcision or something more important than this (see 6:15)? Please explain.
- 2.) Was Paul and Peter trying to divide up the apostles between (the ministries to) Jews and Gentiles? If so, what would be the reason for doing this? If not, what is the point of Paul's conversation with Peter (and company) in 2:6-9?

²⁵ See Paul's reference to the "false circumcision," for example, in Philippians 3:2-3.

²⁶ Four of these men—Paul, Peter, John, and James—are responsible for 21 of the 27 books of the New Testament. To see them in full agreement here is yet another testament to the unity of Christ's gospel.

²⁷ Obviously, these ministries were not exclusively devoted to one group or the other; certainly Peter preached to Gentiles (such as Cornelius and company); Paul preached to Jews; and John foresaw Christ's concern for both (John 10:16, 12:32). Yet the predominance of each man's efforts did focus on one particular group.

≡Lesson Four≡

Paul's Confrontation with Peter (2:11–21)

At some point after Paul's visit to Jerusalem, Peter (Cephas) made a visit to Antioch—no doubt to investigate for himself the news he had heard concerning Paul and Barnabas' work there (2:11). When he first arrived, Peter moved freely among the Gentile converts and ate with them—a sign of fellowship and solidarity. When men from Jerusalem arrived, however, Peter changed his practices and his attitude; he withdrew from the Gentiles, making a distinction between himself (a Jew) and them (2:12).²⁸ These “certain men from James” did not accurately represent James himself (see Acts 15:24), but they did closely identify with him in Jerusalem. “The party of the circumcision” indicates their Jewish prejudices toward Gentile converts. They also were intimidating, convincing Peter, Barnabas, and other Jewish believers to embrace their partiality. “The worst feature of this [fearful] action was the evil effect it produced at Antioch. Why did Peter not fear that? He thought only of himself and of possible attacks from already completely discredited Judaizers.”²⁹

Paul understood the seriousness of this situation immediately. These men were “not straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (2:14a)—i.e., they were acting hypocritically, and thus violated the unity of the church and their own principles (Acts 15:7-10). Paul thus confronted Peter (and possibly others) publicly.³⁰ Peter was in sin and—as a leader of the church—this had to be dealt with before all those against whom he had sinned. The reasons why Paul would include this scenario in his letter to the Galatians include:

- ❑ Paul's apostolic authority was not in any way inferior to that of Peter.
- ❑ Paul showed no partiality toward Jews, Gentiles, or even fellow apostles.
- ❑ The Judaizers had accused Paul (to the Galatians) that he was preaching an incomplete gospel; Paul demonstrates that it is the Judaizers themselves who misrepresented the gospel for their own gain, not him.
- ❑ Legalism leads to separatism, and partiality leads to hypocrisy; neither legalism nor partiality has anything to do with the gospel of Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9, Romans 2:9-11).
- ❑ The Judaists pretended that their Jewish-ness made them superior people (or, closer to God), when in fact all have sinned against God, all need to be redeemed by the same Savior, and all must submit to the same gospel.
- ❑ The Judaists sought conformity among men, not righteousness before God; this fact exposed their self-serving agenda (see 6:12-13).
- ❑ Since Peter was in sin, he needed to be confronted with a view toward restoration, which is exactly what Paul will teach in 6:1-2.

²⁸ No doubt these Jews separated themselves from the Gentiles not only because of racial differences, but also dietary differences. The Jewish purist thought it wicked to eat with a Gentile; but he also considered the Gentiles' foods and manners (i.e., failing to wash ceremoniously) contemptible.

²⁹ Lenski, 97; bracketed word is mine.

³⁰ “Picture the scene; it was surely dramatic in the highest degree. We know of no other case after Pentecost when one apostle corrected another. The aorist [i.e., the completed-action tense of the verb “withstood”—MY WORDS] is significant and implies that Paul withstood successfully, that Peter had no defense, that he yielded. Think how this smashed the Judaistic contention which would have Peter correct Paul and never Paul correct the great Peter” (Lenski, 92). Robertson takes it further: “One is a bit curious to know what those who consider Peter the first pope will do with this open rebuke by Paul, who was in no sense afraid of Peter or of all the rest” (288).

- ❑ In presenting this entire scenario to the Galatians, it would be evident that Paul taught a uniform, consistent, and accurate gospel that did not cater to persuasions of men or religious politics.

Paul presents an irrefutable case against the Judaizers—and against Peter specifically (2:14b-21).

(It is unclear from the original Greek text whether his comments after 2:14 were literally spoken to Peter or are simply Paul's further exposition on what was said at the time.)³¹

- ❑ First, Paul points out the obvious: when Peter is with Gentiles, he lives like a Gentile; yet when he is with Jews, he compels Gentiles to live like Jews (2:14b).
- ❑ Second, Paul admits that Jews have had better opportunity than the Gentiles (“sinners”) until now, but that *no* man can justify himself before God based upon his works (i.e., human effort, as demonstrated through law-keeping) (2:15-16).
- ❑ Third, no one is justified in Christ by engaging in sin—that is, the sin of hypocrisy and partiality. By rebuilding the very wall (or barrier) that Christ tore down through His redemptive work on the cross (see Ephesians 2:13-16), Peter and the others transgressed His gospel. Put another way: if Jews *and* Gentiles are both sinners—and now if they are both redeemed by the same means—there is no justifiable reason for their separation. In effect, “We were sinners already in spite of being Jews. Christ simply revealed to us our sin.”³² Christ will not be a minister of sin, and those who live in sin cannot serve as His ministers (2:17-18).³³
- ❑ Fourth, Paul strenuously upholds the *exclusive allegiance* of the Christian: one who lives to Christ can no longer live by any other person; one who is justified by Christ cannot be justified by any other means (2:19-20). To “die to the Law” means to be under its commandments and constraints no longer; “No master is able to give orders to a dead slave.”³⁴ With these words, Paul makes clear the Christian's *complete legal separation* from the Law of Moses (or any man-made laws and impositions regarding salvation). “I have been crucified with Christ”—i.e., as real and effective as was His literal death, so is my own “death” (to all previous allegiances) real and effective (see Romans 6:3-11). Now he “[lives] by faith” and no longer by law; he no longer lives for (or to) himself, but Christ lives in him (see Romans 1:17, 8:9).
- ❑ Fifth, the one who seeks to be justified by law-keeping after having been justified by Christ completely contradicts his need *for* Christ (2:21). If a person can be justified by his own effort, then there is no need for divine help and “Christ died needlessly.”

This last thought introduces the entire next section of Paul's epistle. Lipscomb rightly observes, “Thus he has vindicated, without dispute, his apostleship, and that the law was dead, and that life and salvation are to be found through Christ, and he urges the folly of leaving the gospel, and turning to the Law of Moses or to any theory of

³¹ Conybeare and Howson, for example, believe that Paul's actual words to Peter end in 2:16 (483).

³² Robertson, 289.

³³ Some commentators believe that Paul implies an argument against “antinomianism” [lit., against (or without) law], a fear among Jewish legalists that by leaving behind the constructs of the Law, men would be “free” to sin without consequence. Thus, to a Jew, “living by faith” sounded like “living without the structure or constraint of law.” (Paul argues against this more directly in Romans 6.) This may be another explanation behind his statement, “Is Christ a minister of sin? May it never be!” (JFB, on 2:17).

³⁴ Lenski, 114.