

STUDY NOTES for GALATIANS ONE

THE GOSPEL of PAUL

Galatians 1:1-24

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the scripture for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

The letter to the Galatians puts the axe to the root of religious legalism while it strengthens the foundation of Christian liberty. It exposes the bondage of the Law and exalts the liberty of pure grace. Although the flesh loves to mix law and grace, it produces a perversion of the latter. Whenever law is added to grace, bondage replaces liberty. The message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is not keeping the deeds and letter of the Law, but it is receiving the death and life of the Lord (2:20). The purpose for writing Galatians was to correct the false teaching of the Judaizers who were adding the works of the Law to the Gospel of Christ for salvation. They caused the believers to question Paul's message by attacking his authority as an apostle. Furthermore, they pictured Christian liberty to be nothing more than a license to sin. To correct this problem, first of all, Paul had to defend his message and his apostolic authority; then he had to prove the doctrine of justification by faith without works to be correct; and finally he had to show that Christian liberty does not lead to lawlessness. The outline of Galatians neatly falls into these three divisions: Defense (Gal 1-2); Doctrine (Gal 3-4); and Deportment (Gal 5-6). This chapter will deal with Paul's message and his apostolic authority to preach it.

A. Right of Paul to Preach the Gospel of Grace – 1:1-5

1: 1 - "*Paul, an apostle*" - his apostleship was under attack by the Judaizers and so he immediately and positively declared he was an apostle at the outset of his letter.

"*Not of men*" - the word, "from," expresses *apo* better than "of." Paul was saying that the source of his apostolic authority was not given to him from men.

"*Neither by man*" - Paul even denied that any man was the means or the agent used by God to give him his apostolic authority. Notice the further use of "neither" in 1:12, 17.

"*But by Jesus Christ, and God the Father*" - His authority came by the agency of Jesus Christ and God the Father.

1:2 - "*The brethren*" - Barnabas and other workers in Antioch were united with Paul. There were others who stood with him in the gospel message that he preached.

"*Churches*" - Paul speaks of the local churches here and in 1:22, but of the universal church in 1: 13.

"*Galatia*" - there was an ethnic territory of Galatia in the north central part of Asia Minor. The Gauls from France settled there and from them it got its name. Later there was a political Galatia that enlarged the ethnic Galatia. Rome took control of ethnic Galatia in 25 B.C., added to it some lands south of the original Galatia and organized it into an imperial province. It was to the southern lands of this provincial Galatia that Paul and Barnabas went as missionaries on their first missionary trip (Acts 13-14). Most modern scholars believe that Paul wrote this letter to these churches, though there are some who believe that he wrote it to the Galatians that lived further to the north in the original Galatia.

1:3 - "*Grace . . . peace*" - a customary greeting in Paul's letters, but he usually added a word of thanksgiving for the believers in his letters, which is conspicuously absent in this letter. It is an indication of the serious problems that these Galatian believers were presenting to him.

1:4 - "*Who gave Himself*" - the theme of the Galatian letter is Christ's finished work for the salvation of sinners. It is briefly stated in this verse which says Christ gave Himself for sinners on the cross.

"That He might deliver us" - Christ's sacrifice on the cross is sufficient to rescue the sinner from danger. Notice, no word about keeping the Law is mentioned as a requirement.

"Evil world" – Paul is speaking of this present sinful age.

"God and our Father" - "our God and Father" is more accurate.

1:5 - "*To whom be glory*" - God already possesses glory, but saved men should endorse it.

"Amen" - "so let it be."

B. Removal of the Galatians from Christ – 1:6-9

1:6 - "*Removed from Him*" – actually the present tense, "removing," suggests that their desertion of God was not yet complete, so there was still time for them to turn around. The Judaizers had undermined the authority and ministry of the apostle Paul so that the Galatian Christians were "removing themselves" (middle voice) from God the Father. They were responsible for their own desertion, even though the Judaizers were encouraging it. This is the primary reason for Paul to take up his pen and write to the Galatian churches. He had to restore his God-given authority with the Galatians and help them stop this removing process.

"That called you" - God called them, not Paul (cf. 1:15).

"Another gospel" – this is another gospel of a different kind. It was not the same gospel that Paul preached. Theirs was a mixture of grace and law that produced bondage, not liberty.

1:7 - "*Which is not another*" - a different word is used for "another" in this verse than in v. 6. This word means another of the same kind. The gospel of the Judaizers was not another of the same kind that Paul preached, with only minor changes added. It was a radically different kind of gospel.

"Trouble you" – the Judaizers had stirred up the believers and threw them into confusion.

"Pervert the Gospel of Christ" - to "pervert" something is to change it into a thing that has the opposite kind of character. Adding law to grace changed the message of the Gospel from hope to despair, from liberty to bondage, from heaven to hell, from Christ's work to man's work.

1:8, 9 - These two verses are almost identical to emphasize Paul's point regarding the curse to be laid on those who preach a false gospel.

"We, or an angel from heaven" – in this verse Paul includes himself or an angel from Heaven as recipients of the curse if he or they preach a false gospel to them. With regard to the angel, Paul may have had Satan in mind, that fallen angel from heaven who gave Eve a false gospel in the garden of Eden. A more likely thought was the reception that he and Barnabas had in Lystra and Derbe after Paul healed a man that was crippled from birth. The people received them as gods come down from heaven.

"Than that which we have preached . . . than that ye have received" - Paul warned them that any message that is different from the one that he preached in the beginning and that they received to be saved is a false gospel. The basis for accepting a man's message was not the miracles he produced, but the positive change it produced in their lives when they received it.

"Let him be accursed" - repeated in both verses to show Paul's strong condemnation of these false preachers. It means those persons who preach a different gospel are set aside for destruction, sentenced forever in Hell (2 Th 1:9; Mt. 23: 13-39).

C. Revelation of the Gospel to Paul - 1: 10-16a

The Judaizers had convinced the Galatians that Paul's message was inferior to that of the apostles at Jerusalem. They said the original apostles had received their message directly from the Lord, and Paul was dependent on the apostles for his message. They said that Paul wanted to have a large Gentile following, so he made the requirements easier by setting aside the Law of Moses for salvation. Paul's objective in these verses is to show that he had not received his message from others, but directly from the Lord.

1:10 - "*Do I now*" - this is a reference to Paul's strong words of condemnation in the previous two verses. If Paul's weakness was to please people, how could that be reconciled with this strong language he had just used?

"*Persuade men*" - usually this is the meaning of *peitho*, but in this context it means "to try to win over." Paul asks, "Am I trying to win over men by condemning those who change the Gospel, or am I trying to win the approval of God?" Obviously the former is not his objective, so the latter must be true.

"*If I yet pleased men*" - this either implies that at one time he did seek to please men (in his pre-Christian days), or it refers to a false charge by the Judaizers that he sought to please men.

"*Servant of Christ*" - literally, a bondsman of Christ. If he sought to please men, he could not be the bondsman of Christ.

1:11 - "*Is not after man*" - the Gospel Paul preached did not originate from man, nor was it developed by man.

1:12 - "*I neither received it of man*" - "I" is emphatic in the Greek, suggesting a contrast with the Judaizers who had received their gospel from others in the form of traditions.

"*Neither was I taught it*" - Paul is excluding every incorrect source for his gospel. He was not taught by the Twelve Apostles in Jerusalem, or even by Ananias in Damascus.

"*But by the revelation of Jesus Christ*" - Paul received his gospel message by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ. This began on the Damascus road and continued when he was in Arabia (v. 17). As a result, his message should be considered trustworthy. It is infallible and inerrant as recorded in the New Testament.

1:13 - "*My conversation*" - Paul's conduct is in view, not only his words.

"*I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it*" – Before Paul was converted, he opposed the church that he now supported. His hostility to the church as a Jewish Pharisee shows he never learned the gospel through Judaism. Judaism caused him to ravage the church (Acts 8:3; 9:21).

1:14 - "*Profited*" - Paul advanced in the Jewish ranks.

"*My equals*" –; this refers to Paul's contemporaries in years.

"*Zealous of the traditions*" – Paul had once been zealous to obey the written interpretations of the Law of Moses (Mk. 7:3-13).

1:15 - "*Separated me from my mother's womb*" - Paul was "marked off" for special service for God before he was born.

1:16a- "*To reveal his Son in me*" - God gave Paul an internal revelation of Jesus Christ. It does not say, "through me," or "by me," but "in me." This internal revelation happened when Paul was converted and Christ began to live in him (2:20). The Spirit began to teach him about Christ while he was alone in Arabia. This can be the experience of any believer that fully surrenders himself to the teaching of the Holy Spirit through the Bible, God's Word (Jn 15:26; 1 Jn 2:20,27). This does not have to be some special revelation.

D. Reliance of Paul on God's Call - 1:16b-24

1:16b – *"Conferred not with flesh and blood"* – Paul did not seek the recognition of the Twelve Apostles for his apostolic call from God. His call was not dependent on them.

1:17 - *"Jerusalem"* - Paul mentioned Jerusalem because that is where the Apostles lived. He made it clear that he did not go there to get their blessing. It appears that the Judaizers told the Galatian believers that the pure form of Christianity was preached by the Apostles in Jerusalem and was practiced by the churches in Judea. If Paul did not get his authority from the Apostles, then Paul's authority was invalid and his message was false. On the other hand, if Paul received his authority from the Apostles, they had greater authority than Paul did, so he must conform to their practice or be disqualified. They pointed out that Paul's practice was different than the Apostles. They circumcised all believers. Paul did not. He preached that it was not necessary to circumcise believers to be saved, so he did not perform this Jewish rite on Gentiles. For this reason the Judaizers strongly opposed Paul's message and practice. Paul replied that he received his call directly from God. His authority was as great as that of the Apostles. He never sought their blessing and approval for his work. He never met with any of the church leaders in Jerusalem until three years after his conversion. Then he only stayed for a short time and only visited with two leaders, and saw none of the Judean churches. He had very little contact with the Judean Christians.

"Arabia" - Paul went to a remote place where God taught him without the help of the Apostles. It is not necessary to think that Paul traveled far. The kingdom of the Nabateans reached as far north as Damascus in New Testament times (cf. Cor. 11:32,33 - Aretas was the Nabatean king).

1:18 - *"Three years"* – Paul was given special revelations from God during the three years he spent in Arabia. He did not receive his doctrine from the Apostles, but directly from God. It took about the same amount of time to retrain Paul for his ministry among the Gentiles as it did to train Peter for his ministry among the Jews.

"To see Peter" - Paul visited Peter to become acquainted with him, but he did not go to Jerusalem to be instructed by Peter.

1:19 - *"Apostles"* - the rest of the Twelve Apostles were not seen. However, Luke says he did see some apostles (Acts 9:27). Who were they? This puzzle can be solved by considering Peter as one of the Twelve, and James as an apostle in a non-technical sense.

"James" – he seems to have been the chief pastor at Jerusalem. Paul visited with him as well as Peter and related to them his experience of salvation and his ministry in Damascus.

1:20 - *"Before God, I lie not"* - Paul knew he was accused by the Judaizers of having a great deal more contact with the Twelve Apostles than he actually did. He uses this statement to solemnly protest such an accusation.

1:21 - *"Syria and Cilicia"* - after Paul's first visit to Jerusalem, he left with a threat on his life. He went back to his birthplace in Tarsus and later he went to Antioch in Syria to help Barnabas in the church there (Acts 9:26-30; 11: 25-26).

1:22 - *"Unknown by face unto the churches of Judea"* - Paul's contact with the Jews in Judea was very limited. He did not visit any of their churches on this trip, so he did not receive his Gospel message from them.

1:23 - *"They had heard only"* - Paul had been in Jerusalem for only fifteen days after he had preached the Gospel in Tarsus and Antioch for eleven years or more. Most of the Jews had heard of him, but relatively few had ever seen Him. What they heard about him, however, they liked.

1:24 - *"Glorified God"* - they glorified God for the work of grace that changed Paul from a persecutor to a preacher. The revelation Paul received of Christ radically changed his whole life.