

## Galatians Chapter 1

The object of this epistle is not difficult to establish. Paul is writing to mainly Gentile believers who had fallen under the influence of Judaisers who were seeking to bring them under the bondage of the law of Moses. Indeed they were telling them that unless they kept the law and the rite of circumcision, they could not be saved.

The danger that the Galatians were in was not unique to them. Paul wrote to Timothy at Ephesus about some who had turned aside from the faith, "desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm". Titus was in Crete when Paul wrote to him, and the apostle wrote of the many vain and unruly talkers, specially they of the circumcision. I believe it was Judaisers that Paul was speaking about in his letter to the Philippians, men who were preaching Christ out of envy and strife, not sincerely, hoping to add affliction to his bonds. These men were everywhere, Jews who had been converted to Christianity, but who found it impossible to leave behind them the old ways.

It is therefore very much a corrective ministry that Paul is going to give them hence there is often a very stern note about his writings. He is not able to open out his heart in the way for example that he wrote to the Philippians.

He begins by first of all by establishing his authority to judge and to correct them. "Paul, an apostle". We never like to be corrected by anyone. Our natural instinct is to ask, "Who does he think he is, telling me off". Well Paul begins by telling them exactly who he is – he is an apostle, a sent-one. He goes on to elaborate in the words that follow, "Not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead". First he says, "not of men". The preposition "of" is the Greek word "apo" which means "from". It can also have the sense of "on account of". An apostle is a sent-one, but he was not sent from men, he was not acting on their account. "Neither by men", he adds. "By" is "dia", by means of. He had not been appointed by men. Rather his apostleship was "by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead". Much of this phrase is unique to this epistle from "the Father" onwards. The Father raised Him from the dead". The Jews in particular would gladly acknowledge the apostleship of the twelve, but many did not recognise Paul. This included some amongst the Corinthians hence he raises the question, "Am I not an apostle?" Paul's apostleship was given Him by an ascended Christ, hence his was a heavenly appointment and not an earthly one. This gave a unique character to Paul's subsequent ministry.

In verse 2, Paul does something else which is unique to this epistle. At the beginning of Philippians and Colossians for example, he joins Timothy with himself in greeting the saints. In the two epistles to the Thessalonians, he includes Silas as well as Timothy, since Silas was with him when he preached the gospel at Thessalonica. But here in Galatians, he does not restrict himself to one or two brethren only. Rather, he says, "and all the brethren which are with me". Why does he do this? Well, some in reading this epistle might have thought that Paul was simply giving vent to his own ideas in these matters. But right at the very beginning of the epistle, Paul is saying as it were, "All the brethren are with me in what I am saying. It's not just me who thinks these things". He is adding greater weight to the ministry which is to follow. The preposition with in the expression "with me" of verse 2 is not just META which implies mere physical presence, but SUN which implies communion, fellowship, a state of mutual agreement. These brethren who were Paul in sending his greetings were of the same mind as himself in relation to the contents of this epistle.

Note that Paul has no need to introduce himself as an apostle when writing to the Philippians or the Thessalonians or Philemon. He was on friendly terms with these saints. These epistles are warm hearted and do not contain great doctrinal truths which required the stamp of his authority

Notice to whom the epistle is addressed – “to the churches of Galatia”. This is thought to include the churches at Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch in Pisidia . It was not to the “Church of Galatia” but to all the churches in the region known as Galatia., churches that Paul visited in Acts 13 and 14. The idea of a church being called by the name of a country or region is totally foreign to the Bible. There is no precedent for a “Church of Scotland” or a “Church of England”. The churches are seen rather as a number of autonomous units scattered throughout a region. A worldly man might think that this would lead to fragmentation, but there is no stronger link than that between assemblies who are walking together in the truth of the New Testament.

There is another thought that comes to mind with the idea of there being several churches to which the epistle is addressed. The evil of which Paul will later speak was not confined to one particular assembly. Rather it had spread throughout the whole region, so it was all the more needful that the apostle should write to overthrow the error that was coming in.

Paul gives his usual salutation of grace and mercy in verse 3. But there is something missing here that it is found in nearly all his apostles. Paul cannot find it in himself to thank God for them. He can even thank God on behalf of the Corinthians with their many failings, but his heart is constrained when writing to the Galatians. Going after Judaism was a particularly evil doctrine as it undermined the very basic truths of the gospel.

In verse 4, Paul makes mention of the work of the Lord Jesus – “who gave Himself for our sins”. This is not meant to be an evangelical statement, for he goes on to tell us the reason why He gave Himself, “that He might deliver us from this present evil age”. In thinking of this present age, the apostle may also have had in mind the whole system of Judaism. The Jews religion was not evil of course, since it came from God Himself, but one cannot deny that it was earthly in character. The Jews had a temple, a priesthood, an altar, incense, offerings etc. All these things depended upon the natural senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. That is why Christendom today has gone in for ornate buildings, gorgeous robes, choirs, incense etc. If you took these things away, the whole system would collapse. It appeals to the flesh rather than the Spirit. Paul says we have been delivered from this present evil age. In chapter 4:9, he speaks of the weak and beggarly elements – such is an earthly religion as compared to a spiritual.

The introduction which closes in verse 5 is therefore curt and rather cold. He quickly comes to the main point of the epistle in verse 6 when he writes, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you... ” . The word “removed” here is a present participle. Paul is saying in effect, “Ye are so soon being removed from Him that called you”. This was an on-going process, already started but not yet complete. Paul’s intention was to halt the process.

We can see the real reason for them being carried away by error. They had been borne away from God first of all. We can sometimes fail to see the strong links that exist between moral condition and the understanding of divine truth. An understanding of the Bible does not automatically come from reading it. We must be in close fellowship with God before we are in a fit state to receive instruction. After all, on a purely human level, the closer we get to a person, the more we will begin to appreciate his thoughts and his feelings. Nor would we divulge our innermost thoughts and feelings to a stranger. So too with God. He will reveal Himself to those who are

close to Him. But if we lose touch with Him, we lose touch with the mind of God, and thus we leave ourselves open to doctrinal error.

The link between spiritual condition and the ability to understand the mind of God comes out strongly elsewhere. So it was with Abraham who received fresh light about inheriting the land after he moved on from Haran into Canaan. Up till then, he had been only partly obedient, but as soon as he moved on, God spoke to him about the land which he would give him.

Then in Daniel chapter 1, it was only after Daniel had taken a stand against eating the food and drinking the wine from the king's table that he was fitted of God to receive understanding in visions and dreams. God honoured Daniel for honouring Himself. Another instance of God thus honouring a man by divine revelation is the apostle John in Revelation chapter 1. John was in Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. His faithfulness had led to him being exiled. But God could see that here was a man who was prepared to make sacrifices for divine truth. And therefore God gave him even further revelations. Our understanding of divine truth is a barometer of our true spiritual condition. The assemblies have often been divided by doctrinal differences – is this not a measure of how far we have strayed from the Lord Himself.

Verse 6 tells us not only what they were removed from, but also what they were removed to. It was to "another gospel". "Another" in this phrase means literally, "another of a different kind". Paul was saying, "to a different gospel". In verse 7, he adds, "which is not another". "Another" in this second phrase is "another of the same kind". The adjective is used by the Lord in John 14 when He speaks of the Holy Spirit as being "another Comforter" ie another of the same kind as Himself. What Paul is saying is that there is only one gospel, and anything which is different is false.

The source of all this evil is the Judaisers. In verse 7, Paul says to the Galatians, they "trouble" you. We find the same word for trouble used in John chapter 5, when we read of an angel coming down from heaven to trouble the waters of the pool of Bethesda. Where there had been calm and tranquillity, it was suddenly disturbed by the action of the angel. So too with the Galatians – they had been enjoying the peace that salvation brings when they were troubled by the activities of the Judaisers. Also, in chapter 3:1, he says of these men, they have bewitched you, and in chapter 5:7, he says, they have hindered you. They troubled, bewitched, and hindered. How awful it will be for men such as this at the judgement seat of Christ. In the gospels, the Lord taught, "Take heed that ye offend not one of those little ones that believe in Me. It were better for him that a millstone were hung about his neck and he were cast into the sea".

Paul now goes on to re-state the confidence he had in the gospel which he preached. So assured is he that he says, "Though we or an angel from heaven preach unto you any other gospel than that which we preached unto you, let him be accursed". That is, even though Paul himself and his companions in service were to go back to Galatia and preach a different gospel from what he had preached before, let him be anathema or accursed. Not only that, suppose an angel were to come from heaven and preach a different gospel, let him be accursed also. The word accursed has the idea of being set aside for judgement. While the judgement itself will be done by God, we would also have to distance ourselves from any such false teachers. One obvious example would be the warning given by Moses to the people of God to separate themselves from the sons of Korah. In Numbers 16:24 we read, "Get you up from about the tabernacles of Korah, Dothan, and Abiram". The judgement of God was about to fall on these men.

If the verse before spoke of "that which we preached", then verse 9 repeats almost exactly the same words, but with one major addition. He reminds the Galatians not only of what he preached but also of what they had received. They had been happy

enough to receive the message then.

Verse 10 asks some questions, the first of which is, "Do I now persuade men or God". The word "persuade" has various meanings such as to conciliate or to satisfy. It cannot possibly mean here "to persuade God", so it must have the sense of "to satisfy". "Do I now satisfy men or God". The same idea is carried forward into the second question, which every servant of God should ask himself. "Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ". No doubt Paul was often under pressure to change his ministry. Some would be unhappy about his going to the Gentiles, and even more would be upset about what they considered to be Paul's setting aside of Israel and its religion. No matter the opposition, however, one must please the Lord rather than men. The disciples in the early Church were under pressure not to preach any more in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. They stood four square with the reply, "We must obey God, rather than men".

Paul in Galatians 1 is not thinking of the opposition of unsaved men. We can take it for granted that these men will oppose the gospel. What is harder to take, however, is to receive opposition from fellow believers. In chapter 4:16 of this epistle, Paul has to ask them the question, "Am I become your enemy, because I tell you the truth". There are in our day many brethren who must have felt like Paul because of the response of their brethren to the truth of God's word.

From verse 11 of chapter 1 to verse 10 of chapter 2, Paul goes on to recount his own personal history in the gospel and its ministry. He speaks of no less than three revelations which he received. The first was the gospel in Ch 1:12, the second was that of Christ in 1:16, and the third was in relation to his visit to Jerusalem in Ch 2:2. He wants to emphasise the divine origins of his ministry and also to show why he was so unyielding when it came to defending the gospel at Jerusalem and at Antioch.

Verse 11 to verse 14, first of all, deals with how Paul received the gospel. He says in verse 11 that it was not according to man, for he neither received it of man, neither was he taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. Before his conversion, there was no-one more zealous of the law than Saul of Tarsus. He profited in the Jews' religion above many of his contemporaries. The expression "the Jews' religion" is rendered in Greek by the word JUDAISMOS, from which we get our word Judaism. He was brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and was steeped in the Jewish religion or Judaism. All the Jews could see that this young man Saul of Tarsus was making great progress in the Jews' religion. He was head and shoulders above his fellows. What King Saul was physically, Saul was religiously. Yet Saul was one of those men that the Lord warned His disciples of in John 16. "Whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service". Saul thought he was doing the will of God by stamping out this sect of the Nazarene. Saul therefore became a man to be feared. So convinced was he about the truth of Judaism that he determined to stamp out this new heresy of Christianity, and not content with creating havoc amongst the church at Jerusalem, he went off with letters of authority from the high priest to seek out the Christians of Damascus also. All this must have been very telling for the Galatians. Here they were being dragged into Judaism by the zeal of certain Jews, and now the man who is trying to dissuade them is the man who once the arch Judaiser himself.

At the end of verse 13, Paul talks about how he persecuted the church of God and wasted it. Some brethren would have us believe that every time the church of God is mentioned in the Bible, it has to do with the local company only. Yet is this not an example in Galatians 1 of the whole church of God in Jerusalem and Damascus being persecuted by Saul. By Acts chapter 5, the number of believers had increased to 5,000. Who knows how many more by Acts 9. There were far too many to meet together as one assembly so even by Acts 9 they would be meeting in many smaller groups. Yet Paul calls it "the church of God". It is as applicable to Galatians 1 as it is to

I Cor where Paul writes to the "Church of God which is at Corinth". So too with the expression "the body of Christ". It is as applicable to "the church, which is His body" (Eph 1:22,23), as it is to the church at Corinth, of whom Paul says, "Ye are body of Christ, and members in particular".

With regards to his conversion, no man of course would have dared to preach the gospel to Saul of Tarsus. It took a direct intervention in his life by the Lord Jesus Himself, as He laid Saul low in the dust of the Damascus road. What no man could do, the Lord did Himself. Paul's conversion was therefore unique in every way. So bad had been his reputation before his conversion, that it took a vision from the Lord to convince Ananias to go and meet Saul. The disciple said, "I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name". But when the Lord told Ananias that "he is a chosen vessel unto Me", he went to Saul and there he baptised him in the house. The Lord however saw to it that no apostle or indeed any other believer from Jerusalem had any part in Saul's conversion and baptism. Indeed when Saul went to Jerusalem soon afterwards, the church would not receive him because they believed not that he was a disciple. It was only after the intervention of Barnabus that Paul was received at Jerusalem.

One might have thought however that even though Paul was converted without hearing the gospel, he would have learned the simple truths of it from those who were saved before him. Paul now says in verse 12 about the gospel, "Neither was I taught it but by revelation of Jesus Christ". Paul makes reference to this revelation in I Corinthians 15. "I delivered unto you that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...etc". In I Corinthians 11, Paul also states how he received a revelation regarding the Lord's Supper. When the gospel and the Supper came under attack he was able to defend them with confidence knowing that the source of his ministry was the Lord Himself.

In verses 15 and 16, Paul goes on to mention the second revelation in this chapter. "But when it pleased God..... to reveal His Son in me". Paul was a chosen vessel for the Lord. He was absolutely unique and that is why he mentions being separated from his mother's womb. God made use of all his formative years – the years in Tarsus, the instruction by Gamaliel, the learning in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, the Roman citizenship, the tireless energy - to shape the man who would become a champion of the gospel. Now the purpose of those years is revealed, "To reveal His Son in me". Notice it does not say "to me" or "by me". Paul was the special unique vessel chosen by God to reveal His Son. It is reminiscent of Hebrews 1 where we read that God has spoken in Son. We find another example of this kind of thing in Jeremiah 1:5. "Before thou camest forth out of the womb, I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations".

The life of Paul spoke as much as the words of Paul. Men could see the character of Christ being worked out in his life as much as by what they heard him speak. Paul was an example of the love of Christ. In Philippians chapter 1, he writes to the saints, "For God is my witness how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ". Paul is telling them that the love he had in his heart for these saints was the same kind of love as that seen in the life of the Lord Jesus. This might seem too bold a claim for any man to make but Paul precedes his statement with, "God is my witness". We see also the faith of Christ evidenced in the life of Paul. The greatest example of Paul's faith is seen in Acts 27 of which we will speak later in chapter 2. We see the unselfishness of Paul in Philippians chapter 1. Paul is contemplating heaven. "To be with Christ, which is very far better. He is now an old man with a battered body, languishing in a Roman prison. One can hardly blame Paul for having such desires. Yet he considers the saints and sets aside heaven for them. "To abide in the flesh is more

needful for you". Paul writes to others about the meekness and gentleness of Christ. We see these traits in his own life when he writes to the Thessalonians "I was gentle among you as a nurse cherisheth her own children". We see his meekness also when he describes himself not only as the least of the apostles but the least of all saints.

From verse 17 to the end, Paul continues his own personal history to show what little contact he had with the other apostles in Jerusalem. He returned after his conversion to Arabia, and did not come to Jerusalem till some three years later. He is quite specific about how long he spent there. He abode fifteen days, no more, no less. He did not go for a lengthy course of instruction. The only apostles he met were Peter, with whom he stayed, and James the Lord's brother. "But other of the apostles saw I none". He had only the briefest meeting with the apostles.

How sad that Paul has to affirm in verse 20, "Now the things that I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not". Were there even some who might have thought Paul guilty of lying?

The chapter ends with Paul describing his visits to Syria and Cilicia, and how he was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea. He not only had the briefest contact with the apostles but was a stranger to the churches of Judaea. He owed nothing of his ministry to men, no matter how favoured they might have been.

Given Paul's previous history, it is no wonder that he concludes with, "They glorified God in me". He was a true trophy of grace.