

Wednesday Evening Bible Study

November 25, 2020

Series – The Life and Writings of the Apostle Paul

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

What Happened?!?

Text – Galatians 1:1 - 12

Introduction

After considering the historical and geographical contexts surrounding this wonderful letter to the Galatians, we will now dive into the text itself. Paul wastes no time getting straight to the point. This letter gives a very stern rebuke for the apparent departure by many in Galatia to add works to grace. Even in his salutation (vs. 1 – 5), Paul sets the tone for the epistle.

I. Paul Delivers a Short Welcome to the Churches of Galatia (vs. 1 – 5)

A. Paul Identifies Himself (vs. 1 – 2)

"Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)" (Galatians 1:1)

Paul's greeting to the churches of Galatia is different from the salutations given to other churches and individuals. Keep in mind, however, that this is very likely Paul's first recorded letter. Notice how he introduces his other letters (Note – similarities are in colors or bold-face:

"Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God," (Romans 1:1)

"Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother," (1 Corinthians 1:1)

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia:" (2 Corinthians 1:1)

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus:" (Ephesians 1:1)

"Paul and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:" (Philippians 1:1 – note no mention here of being an apostle)

***"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother,"
(Colossians 1:1)***

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thessalonians 1:1)

"Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:" (2 Thessalonians 1:1)

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;" (1 Timothy 1:1)

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus," (2 Timothy 1:1)

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness;" (Titus 1:1)

"Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer," (Philemon 1:1)

In Galatians, however, Paul more strongly emphasizes his apostleship. He makes it clear that his apostleship was not "of men" or "by men." He was called to be an apostle by God. One of the secondary purposes of this letter, which also supports his main argument, is that he has equal authority to any of the Jerusalem apostles.

We see Paul defending his apostleship in other letters as well, especially 1st and 2nd Corinthians, which were letters also dealing with problems:

"1 Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? 2 If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord." (1 Corinthians 9:1-2)

"5 For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles." (2 Corinthians 11:5)

"11 I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing. 12 Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds." (2 Corinthians 12:11-12)

Note on apostleship – The word, "apostle" (ἀπόστολος – *Apostolos*), literally means messenger; one sent forth with orders. It many times specifically refers to the twelve

chosen by the Lord Jesus during His earthly ministry (Matthew 10:1 – 4; Luke 6:13). The question that is often debated by theologians is: “Are there more than twelve apostles?” We know that Judas had fallen from his apostleship by betraying the Lord, which indicates that though he was chosen by the Lord, he was never a true believer. Jesus said: *"31 ... If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;"* (John 8:31).

Peter took up a vote in Acts 1 to replace Judas, but I am not sure if this was what God wanted him to do (see Acts 1:15 – 26). The last instructions that Peter got from the Lord was to wait (*"49 ... tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high"* (Luke 24:49). The power Jesus referred to was the power of the Holy Ghost, which did not come until Acts 2.

The biblical qualifications for the office of apostleship were:

- a.) An eyewitness of the resurrected Christ (Acts 1:22; I Corinthians 9:1; 15:8)
- b.) Audibly called to be an apostle by the Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 10:5; Rom. 1:1)

For this reason, we do not have apostles today.

Some believe that there were only twelve apostles, and that Paul is the twelfth, not Matthias. Others believe that there were many apostles. Acts 14:14 includes Barnabas with Paul as “apostles:”

"14 Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out," (Acts 14:14)

1 Corinthians 15:5 states that Jesus was seen of the twelve after the resurrection (which could not have included Judas – indicating that the phrase “the twelve” was used in a general sense referring to the one that the Lord chose during his earthly ministry). In verse 7, it states that “after that” (being seen by the twelve) Jesus was seen by “all of the apostles.”

"4 And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: 5 And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: 6 After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. 7 After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. 8 And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time." (1 Corinthians 15:4-8)

So, it seems that the Scriptures warrant additional apostles than just “the twelve,” but there does seem to be a special hierarchy, which includes only “the twelve.” Is the twelfth Paul or Matthias? You decide.

"14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." (Revelation 21:14)

"And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:" (Galatians 1:2)

At the end of Paul’s first missionary journey, he had Barnabas. He had Barnabas and Titus with him when he went to Jerusalem. At the beginning of his second journey, he had Silas with him, and eventually Timothy (Acts 15:40; 16:2).

Remember that Galatia is not a city with one church, but an area with many churches. These churches were the ones that were established on the first missionary journey (Acts 14:23). Strictly speaking, the Galatian churches consisted of Lystra, Antioch, Iconium, and Derbe. It is certainly possible that the other churches that were established on that first journey, which were not within the actual borders of Galatia, were also included in the distribution of this letter.



B. Paul Establishes His Purpose (vs. 3 – 5)

"Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." (Galatians 1:3-5)

Notice the word *grace*. Paul opens up nearly all of his letters with the greeting, *grace be unto you*. This letter is all about God's grace – God's unmerited favor; God's giving us something that we do not deserve. We deserve Hell, yet God offers grace. There were some people travelling to Galatia who were complicating, corrupting, and confusing the grace of God. Paul will teach here in this letter that the saints in Galatia were falling prey to these legalists, and were falling from grace (Galatians 5:4) – not that they were losing their salvation, but that they were leaving the doctrine of grace. Paul establishes here in these opening verses that these believers in Galatia needed to get back to grace.

Paul reminds them in v. 4 that Jesus died to provide grace, and that going back to a works religion was really a denial of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Illustration - Grace

A story is told about Fiorello LaGuardia, who, when he was mayor of New York City during the worst days of the Great Depression and all of WWII, was called by adoring New Yorkers 'the Little Flower' because he was only five foot four and always wore a carnation in his lapel. He was a colorful character who used to ride the New York City fire trucks, raid speakeasies with the police department, take entire orphanages to baseball games, and whenever the New York newspapers were on strike, he would go on the radio and read the Sunday funnies to the kids. One bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city. LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself.

Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. She told LaGuardia that her daughter's husband had deserted her, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving. But the shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor." the man told the mayor. "She's got to be punished to teach other people around here a lesson." LaGuardia sighed. He turned to the woman and said "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions--ten dollars or ten days in jail." But even as he

pronounced sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket. He extracted a bill and tossed it into his famous sombrero saying: "Here is the ten dollar fine which I now remit; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Baliff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant." So the following day the New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was turned over to a bewildered old lady who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren, fifty cents of that amount being contributed by the red-faced grocery store owner, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents for the privilege of doing so, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

Notice that Christ *"gave himself for our sins:"*

"8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

"15 This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief." (1 Timothy 1:15)

"10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10)

This phrase summarizes the main argument in Galatians. Salvation from sin comes through Christ, and nothing else. This was the message that was under attack by the Judaizers. See also Galatians 2:19 – 21.

Notice also that Christ came *"to deliver us from this present evil world."* Satan is the "god of this world" (2 Corinthians 4:4). The word, "world" (αἰῶνος from αἰών – *aiōn*), is the word for "age." It speaks of the world system established by Satan (Romans 12:2; 1 John 2:15 – 16).

"12 Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light: 13 Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son:" (Colossians 1:12-13)

This world we are living in is a wicked place, because it is ruled by Satan. God is allowing him (for a time) to have his way. He is still on a leash, but he certainly has been effective in deceiving the vast majority of people, including the rulers:

"4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." (2 Corinthians 4:4)

The only thing that is holding back Satan's agenda on the earth right now is the Holy Spirit of God. He is the restrainer of the evil (2 Thessalonians 2:7). Satan wants to get his hands on you, but God won't allow him to touch you. God has delivered you from Satan's grasp. Someday you and I, and the influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit, will be removed from this earth by way of the rapture, and then Satan and all his demons will have a free-for-all down here.

That why we are not supposed to be conformed to this world (Romans 12:2), and that is why we should not love this world:

"15 Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." (1 John 2:15-17)

Spurgeon stated:

In Paul's day the world was in a horrible state. Then, the slave was chained to his master's door like a dog and slept at night in a hole under the stairs, and the slave's master indulged in all kinds of debauchery and sin. The cruelty of the Romans satisfied itself with gladiatorial shows where men murdered each other to make a public holiday. Christ came to gather out a people even from among these abominations, and He did gather them out—a holy people who could not and would not live as the rest of the world lived. They did not go away into the deserts or hide themselves in caves, living as hermits; but they went up and down in the earth, attending faithfully to the duties of daily life, yet everywhere marked as differing from other men. Their moral tone, their whole thought about the things of this world and the next, was altogether different from that of the rest of mankind; for Christ had come to draw them out of the kennel of iniquity in which others lived like beasts, to lift them up out of the bog of sin and make them to be a pure-minded, holy, kind, generous, loving people who should be like their Master, Jesus Christ. For this purpose the Savior died. He thought it worth His while even to die upon the cross that He might thereby make a better, purer, nobler, more unselfish, more devout people than as yet had appeared in the Roman or Jewish world. This, then, is the

great object of Christ's death: to deliver us from the world's condemnation and to deliver us from the world's condition.¹

Notice that it was God's will that we be delivered:

God loves us. He is not willing that we perish:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

Notice that all of this is for His glory (v. 5 – Read Ephesians 1:3 – 14 – notice vs. 6, 12, and 14).

Transition - After Paul delivers his short welcome to the churches of Galatia, he then:

II. Paul Discusses Their Stunning Withdrawal from the Concept of Grace (vs. 6 -12)

A. Paul's Amazement (vs. 6 – 7)

The word, "marvel" (θαυμάζω – *thaumazō* – Verb – Pres.; Act.; Ind.; 1st Per.; Plur.), means "to wonder." Paul was wondering what happened to the pure gospel that was preached to these Galatians by Paul and Barnabas just a short while ago on their first journey.

The word, "removed" (μετατίθεσθε from μετατίθημι – *metatithēmi* – Verb ' Pres.; Mid. Or Pass.; Ind.; 2nd Per.; Plur.) means "to fall away or abandon one thing for another." These Galatians were not just backing away from God that were abandoning grace and replacing it with works. The idea here is that they abandoned what they were taught by Paul and were actually embracing false teachers.

Notice that there is only one gospel. A works salvation is not the gospel at all, and certainly not good news at all.

Trying to work your way to Heaven is troubling ("trouble" - ταρασσοντες from ταρασσω – *tarassō* – Verb – Pres.; Act.; Part.; Nom.; Plur.; Masc.). It is troubling because it is impossible.

Note – it is ingrained into the mindset of the world that they would have to do something in order to please God enough to let them into Heaven. It is a tremendous relief to finally get to the place where you comprehend the free gift of God's grace. That heavy burden of sin and religion is removed off of you, but then you are confronted by somebody who wants to throw that burden back on top of you. It's very troubling.

A works salvation is a perversion of the gospel (pervert - μεταστρέψαι from μεταστρέφω *metastrephō* – Verb – Aor.; Act.; Inf.).

¹ Charles Spurgeon, *Galatians*, ed. Elliot Ritzema, Spurgeon Commentary Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2013), Ga 1:4–5.

B. Paul's Anathema (vs. 8 – 9)

Paul then twice pronounces a severe curse hypothetically upon anyone who would pervert the pure gospel. The word, “accursed” (ἀνάθεμα – *anathema* – Noun – Nom.; Sing.; Neut.). I am not sure exactly what this means, but I do know that Paul could not have pronounced a more severe warning of judgment on these Judaizers. Obviously, the judgment of Hell would certainly be upon anyone who believed and taught a works salvation, unless they repented.

John Phillips states:

Throughout the Scripture, the strongest language is reserved not for the murderer, or the adulterer, or the extortioner but for those who propagate religious error. John the Baptist called the Pharisees and the Sadducees a “generation of vipers” (Matt. 3:7). Jesus called the scribes and the Pharisees hypocrites, whited sepulchers, serpents, and a generation of vipers (Matt. 23:25, 27, 33). Now Paul pours out his own divinely inspired barrage of condemnation against the Judaizers—or anyone else, for that matter, who propagates false doctrine.²

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha." (1 Corinthians 16:22)

By the way – this severe rebuke applies to anybody who preaches anything other than salvation by grace through faith, no matter how moral or nice they might be.

McGee said: “The gospel shuts out all works.”³ Romans 4:5 says,

“But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.” (Romans 4:5)

C. Paul's Attestation (vs. 10 – 12)

Paul here refers to his salvation experience on the road to Damascus. No evangelist preached the gospel to him; they couldn't. He probably would have had the man killed who dared to try to witness to him. No, it was the Lord Himself who appeared to Saul of Tarsus. Paul then spent three years of one-on-one time with the Lord in Arabia (Galatians 1:17).

Man's gospel will always include works, but God's gospel is about the absolutely free gift of salvation. McArthur states: “The gospel Paul preached was not human in origin or it would have been like all other human religion, permeated with works righteousness born of man's pride and Satan's deception (Rom. 1:16).”⁴

² John Phillips, *Exploring Galatians: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Kregel Publishers; WORDsearch Corp., 2009), Ga 1:8–9.

³ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible Commentary*, electronic ed., vol. 5 (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 154.

⁴ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 1789.