

The Book Of Galatians

Galatians 1:1-2

“Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),² and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia.”

There are 27 books in the New Testament. Of these 27 books, over half were written by one man - the Apostle Paul. If we accept the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, then Paul wrote 14 out of the 27 New Testament books. **He is the outstanding apostle of the New Testament.** His letters contain revelation found nowhere else in the Bible, and if it were not for the letters of Paul, we would be in almost total darkness concerning the truth of the Church as the Body of Christ, its function, activity and destiny. **His message was a new message, a mystery not known before - a message received direct from Heaven as a new revelation of divine truth.** The heart of this new message was the "grace of God," extended to all men everywhere, wholly and entirely apart from the works of the Law. The message before this had been limited to the Nation of Israel, and **the Gentiles could only be saved by becoming Jews, submitting to the right of circumcision and placing themselves under the laws and rituals of the Israelites.** These are called Jewish proselytes.

When Paul came with his message of grace, it met with serious misgivings by the eleven apostles, who were still preaching the Kingdom message to the Jews only. Because of his prominence in the New Testament we now mention some things about Paul *personally*, which will help us to understand this *opposition* and *rejection* by the Judaizers. **Paul was a Jew - born in Tarsus, a son of a Roman citizen.** He received his secular education in Tarsus, and Acts 22:3 tells us he received his theological training in Jerusalem under the great teacher, Gamaliel. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling religious body in Israel, a prominent member of the strictest sect of the Pharisees. **He was devoted to Judaism, and was fanatical in his defense of what he believed to be the only true**

religion. He took a prominent part in the martyrdom of Stephen, and became a bitter enemy of Christianity. While on a mission to arrest and prosecute the Christians in Damascus, he was dramatically converted by a personal meeting with the Lord Jesus. Smitten with blindness for three days, he was befriended by one of the despised believers in Damascus, Ananias, who entertained and baptized him, and Paul launched out on his ministry.

After Paul's conversion, he made a brief visit to Jerusalem, but the Christians there were afraid of him, and he soon left and departed for his home city of Tarsus, and from there went to Arabia for three years, where he received the revelation of the new message of the mystery of the Church, the Body of Christ, and the Age of Grace. It was undoubtedly when here in Arabia, that he was caught up into the “**third heaven**” and heard and saw the things recorded in 2 Corinthians 12. After three years he returned to Tarsus where he is found by Barnabas and brought to Antioch. Here they labored for one whole year and saw great numbers of the Gentiles brought to Christ.

After this year of ministry in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas made a brief trip to Jerusalem to bring relief to the poor suffering Jewish disciples, and upon their return to Antioch are sent forth as the first Christian missionaries. The balance of the Book of Acts deals almost exclusively with the journeys and ministry of the Apostle Paul. After his first missionary journey, Acts 15 tells us that Paul is called to give a report, and to account for his message before the apostles in Jerusalem. His enemies accused him of preaching heresy and he went to Jerusalem to report to the apostles. Here it was decided that the message of grace, which Paul preached to the Gentiles, was truly the message of Christ from Heaven. It was decided that the Gentile Christians were not under the Jewish law. This is the last time the apostles in Jerusalem are mentioned. Peter and all the rest of the eleven with their Kingdom message to Israel, now bow out of the picture, Israel is temporarily set aside, the Kingdom is postponed, and the new message of grace brought by Paul now goes to the entire world.

It is well to note here the sharp and distinct difference between the message Paul preached and the message committed to the apostles. The message of Peter was to *Israel*, while Paul is the Apostle to the *Gentiles*. This was fact is brought out for us in Galatians 2:7, “when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter...they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” The apostles never sought to minister to anyone but Jews with their Kingdom message. Only on one occasion did an apostle go to the Gentiles, and that was when Peter preached to *Cornelius* who was a Gentile (Acts 10), to exercise the final use of the keys.

The apostles established no churches outside of Judea, but limited their ministry to Jerusalem and the Jews. Even after the death of Stephen when the Church was scattered, the apostles continued in Jerusalem ministering only to Israel. After Stephen’s death we read in Acts 8:1, “...they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, *except the apostles.*” Even those who were scattered abroad did not preach to the Gentiles, as seen in Acts 11:19, “Now they which were scattered abroad ... traveled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none *but unto the Jews only.*”

When some of them did begin to preach to the Grecians (Grecian Jews), Acts 11:22 tells us the apostles sent Barnabas to investigate. But when Barnabas saw the grace of God among these Grecians he did not go back to report to the apostles, who had sent him, but instead went immediately to Tarsus to find Paul, and brought him back to Antioch. Barnabas knew the apostolic message was not for Antioch, but that Paul was the man to take over with the *new message of grace.*

The eleven apostles never founded any Gentile churches. It was Paul who was God's messenger for this *dispensation.* As a result of

Paul's ministry, Gentile assemblies resulted in Antioch, Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, Ephesus, Philippi, Colosse, and others. **Unless we keep this background in mind, that Paul's distinctive message was to all men, Jews and Gentiles, we cannot not rightly divide the Word of Truth and reconcile the Gospel, which Paul preached with the message of the apostles.** It will also explain the bitter opposition Paul experienced from his brethren according to the flesh. They had been taught to consider the Gentiles as unclean dogs and outside the covenant of grace. **When Paul therefore offered to these Gentiles salvation by grace alone, they were most bitter in their opposition and finally succeeded in bringing about his arrest and execution.** It will also explain why Paul was always and everywhere called on to defend his apostleship. They would not accept him as an apostle because he did not receive his commission from the apostles, nor did he preach the apostolic message.

This background study will help us to understand what Paul was saying in verse 1, "Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." There are at least three things that we can see in this statement as we look at what Paul has said.

First of all, Paul meant that he belonged to Christ. His life was not his own to do with as he liked; for he was the possession of Jesus Christ, and he must always live a life that would exalt his Lord. This was not a new message, for we are told in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, what are God's." So, you see, we too have been purchased by the Lord Christ, and the time has come for us to realize that in us dwells the Holy Spirit of God, and there just might be a need to have a spiritual "house cleaning."

Secondly, Paul meant that he was commissioned by Christ. The Greek word translated here for "apostle," actually means "to dispatch or to be sent out." Paul is saying that, "I have been sent out by the Lord

Christ to do a job." You and I that name the name of Jesus Christ, should realize that we make up a part of the "task-force" that has been commissioned by God Himself to do His work here on this earth.

You see, it is through God's faithful followers. If people are going to be saved, then we must be faithful witnesses. If people are going to know the love of God, then we must be willing to allow the love of Christ to flow through us. If the program of the church is going to be financed, then it will be because we are willing to give our money.

We have been commissioned *by* Christ to work *for* Christ for the glory *of* Christ in our lives!

Thirdly, Paul meant that any power he possessed was a delegated power. John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the children of God, even to them that believe on his name." Then we have been told in Acts 1:8, "But you shall receive power, after the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The child of God possesses a delegated "power" to do the ministry that God has called us to do.

It is with this in mind that we read again what Paul has said in relationship to his calling, "Paul, an apostle (not of men, neither by men, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." I am not trying to be judgmental when I say this, but I am afraid that we have too many ministers, preachers, evangelists, and Bible teachers today that are apostles of men. Sent out by men, and consequently, their message is to please men. It just seems to me that we have too many "assembly line" preachers today. And we are living in a time when, if a man or woman is going to experience any measure of success in the ministry, they almost have to be a product of some denominational hierarchy.

Paul wanted it clearly understood that he did not receive his calling from a church or a group of men, but that his calling was from God!

Because Paul understood who did the calling, he could conclude in verses 10-11, "For do I now seek the favor of men, or of God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not after man." Paul is actually saying, "If God does the calling, then God is the one that I should be pleasing."

They will soon realize that Paul's preaching was called into question because it went against what the religious leaders of his day were teaching. In other words, he broke the rank of their religious traditions. And in order to destroy Paul's message, there were those who tried to destroy Paul. **They lied about his motives and questioned his authority as an apostle.** Why? Because they did not want to be exposed to their own selfish way and closed mindedness.

This was the occasion for Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. It was Paul's answer to the *false doctrine* of the legalists that says, "Even if we are saved by grace, we are kept by our works." The new message of Paul, which was received from Heaven, but rejected by the legalistic Judaizers in Jerusalem, was this: "We are saved by grace and kept by grace, wholly apart from the works of the law." The key word of the message of Paul was "grace," plus nothing.

Today the problem of the Galatians is still with us, in spite of the clear teaching of the Word of God. Men are made to believe they must *do something* to be saved. Men try to add something to salvation by grace - religion, good works, church membership, ordinances, and the works of the law. But the Bible says in Romans 4:5, "But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners."