

# Paul's Letter to the Galatians

Notes by Doug Hamilton

Acts 14:24-28 They passed through Pisidia and came into Pamphylia.<sup>25</sup> When they had spoken the word in Perga, they went down to Attalia.<sup>26</sup> From there they sailed to Antioch, from which they had been commended to the grace of God for the work that they had accomplished.<sup>27</sup>

When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they *began* to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.<sup>28</sup> And they spent a long time with the disciples.

- The year was about 52 AD and the location was Antioch of Syria. The apostle Paul and Barnabas had conducted a difficult, but successful campaign through the southern region of Galatia. They gave a report to the Brethren of all that occurred on that very important mission that reached out to the gentiles.
- *Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* This prompted them to go to Jerusalem to clarify this before the apostles and the church for they had run into that on the mission field from the Judaizers. The decision was rendered and a letter was sent back with Paul and Barnabas clarifying the graces of God in and apart from circumcision.
- *Acts 15:22-29 Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas—Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren,<sup>23</sup> and they sent this letter by them, "The apostles and the brethren who are elders, to the brethren in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia who are from the Gentiles, greetings.<sup>24</sup> "Since we have heard that some of our number to whom we gave no instruction have disturbed you with their words, unsettling your souls,<sup>25</sup> it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,<sup>26</sup> men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> "Therefore we have sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will also report the same things by word of mouth.<sup>28</sup> "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:<sup>29</sup> that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell."*
- Now back in Antioch of Syria, Paul hears that the false teaching of the Judaizers has reached the ears of the churches of the region of Galatia and would have to immediately be addressed, hence the Letter to the Galatians.

Galatians 1:1-6 Paul, an apostle (not *sent* from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead),<sup>2</sup> and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:<sup>3</sup> Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,<sup>4</sup> who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,<sup>5</sup> to whom *be* the glory forevermore. Amen.

## Problem #1) Attacking the Messenger

- From the very greeting of the letter to the Galatians, we find Paul in defense of his apostleship. This is the first of two primary problems with the Galatian church family, for they were calling into question the very apostleship of Paul. This was happening for a couple of reasons.

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1. He did not meet all the criteria of an apostle. *Acts 1:21-22* “Therefore it is necessary that of the men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us<sup>22</sup> beginning with the baptism of John until the day that He was taken up from us—one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.” Paul did not witness what the other apostles did; He did not travel with Jesus during His three and half year ministry. Some would dismiss him on that basis.
  2. Paul was a persecutor of the church. Concerning the treatment of the church, he wrote in *1 Timothy 1:13* “...I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor.” Prior to his conversion to Christianity he personally arranged for the persecution and execution of many in the early church. This was a great obstacle to overcome for early the Christians.
- Besides this there was a group of Judaizers that followed on the tail of Paul's labors, seeking to undermine the work. We saw them early in the first missionary journey from the Book of Acts.
    - *Acts 13:45* But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and *began* contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.
    - *Acts 13:48-50* When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.<sup>49</sup> And the word of the Lord was being spread through the whole region.<sup>50</sup> But the Jews incited the devout women of prominence and the leading men of the city, and instigated a persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.
    - *Acts 14:1-2* In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.<sup>2</sup> But the Jews who disbelieved stirred up the minds of the Gentiles and embittered them against the brethren.
    - *Acts 14:19* But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.
  - These Judaizers were zealots for the Law and sought at every turn to undermine the workings of Paul. Their constant meddling seemed to infect the congregations all along the missionary trail, including the Galatians. No sooner would Paul leave a successful mission campaign for the church than the Judaizers would come in with their team and begin to belittle the messenger. They firmly believed in Judaism and fought to prevent Christian conversion. Their continuous attacks on Paul the messenger of Christ eventually began to affect the brethren, leading them to call his apostleship into question. He was the one that initially taught them the gospel and now he was being ridiculed. This was a bit upsetting to say the least.
  - Even though there was obvious tension from the onset of the letter, he still offers a loving greeting of grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The difference is the added emphasis on the deliverance from the present evil age by the workings of Christ, which leads into the second problem of the Galatians.

Galatians 1:6-10 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;<sup>7</sup> which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.<sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!<sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to

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what you received, he is to be accursed! <sup>10</sup> For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

## Problem #2) Attacking the Message

- Not only did they attack the messenger Paul, but also the message of the gospel. When Paul passed through the region of Galatia only a few years prior, he preached the sweet message of the gospel of Christ. The good news that Jesus was dead, buried and resurrected resonated well with the gentiles and they pursued eternal life.
  - Acts 14:1 In Iconium they entered the synagogue of the Jews together, and spoke in such a manner that a large number of people believed, both of Jews and of Greeks.
  - Acts 14:6-7 states in "...Lycaonia, Lystra and Derbe, and the surrounding region; <sup>7</sup> and there they continued to preach the gospel."
  - Acts 14:21-22 After they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, <sup>22</sup> strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and *saying*, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God."
- This GOSPEL message offered hope to a people that had none. The message of the gospel was simple, yet complete, offering a relationship with God through Jesus Christ His blessed and holy Son. It was not based in the works of the Law, but on the merciful grace of God.
- We must understand that prior to Christ, the Jews were quite hostile in their attitudes toward the gentiles. Here are just a few of the arrogant sayings that illustrate their attitude.
  - "God loves only Israel of all the nations that He made."
  - "God will judge Israel with one measure and the gentiles with another."
  - "The best of the snakes crush; the best of the gentiles kill."
  - "God created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell."
- With pagan Rome ruling the land, the relationship of the Jew toward the gentile was so strained that it left a huge barrier between the two. It was actually illegal for a Jewish woman to come to the aid of a birthing gentile for it would be bringing another gentile into the world.
- The gospel was a message that could unite Jews and gentiles once and for all, making them one in Christ. *Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. To the gentiles the message of the gospel was more than salvation, but a message of unity for all.*

## Altering the Gospel of Christ

- Paul made the accusation against them that they were following a different gospel than what they started out with. It was so much that they did not believe in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but that they allowed some of the Judaizers to influence what they were taught. There were a couple of teachings that seeped into the churches of Galatia and sent a confusing message.
  1. That the gentile Christians would need to be circumcised.
  2. That the gentile would need to take on the burden of the Law.
- Basically put: If a gentile wanted to become a good Christian, then let him become a Jew first. This went contrary to the teachings of Christ, for ... "it was for freedom

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that Christ set us free..." (Gal 5:1). They had added to the gospel of Christ, making it into something that Christ never intended.

### "The" Gospel

- Notice that Paul does not use "a" gospel, but "the" gospel. This is a definite article specifying a defined gospel. The gospel is specific good news concerning the message of Christ.
  - Romans 1:16 - "The" gospel is specific good news that is the power of God for salvation.
  - 1 Corinthians 9:16 - "The" gospel is specific good news that we should burn with passion to share with others.
  - 2 Timothy 1:8 - "The" gospel is specific good news worth being persecuted for in defense of.
  - 1 Peter 1:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:7 - "The" gospel is specific good news that must be obeyed if we are to have hope.
  - 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 - "The" gospel is specific good news that is centered on the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.
  - 2 Timothy 1:10 - "The" gospel is specific good news of life and immortality through Jesus.
  - 1 Thessalonians 3:2 - "The" gospel is the specific good news that unites us into co-workers for the kingdom of God.
  - 1 Corinthians 9:23 - "The" gospel is the specific good news that we do all things for the sake of.
- The gospel was the good news of Jesus dying for our sins on the cross and being resurrected from the grave on the third day. This proved that He had the power over death and the ability to forgive us for our sins. We can and will live the rest of our lives for Him because He saved us. That is GOOD NEWS of a specific nature.
- The Galatians had allowed to be altered by letting the Judaizers complicate with their traditions. Now instead of walking by faith in the grace and mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ they are subjecting themselves to the Law that Jesus did away with. The end result is a bunch of rule-keepers rather than faith-walkers.
- To this Paul emphatically stated twice that they were not to ever allow anyone to teach them a different gospel other than that which they received. CUT THEM OFF!
- A large remaining portion of the letter will be to refute the two problems of attacking the messenger and the message of the gospel.

### What to take away from the lesson?

#### A) Be a Messenger of the Gospel.

Don't worry what the world is going to say about you, share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others.

#### B) Be a Defender of the Gospel.

Don't sit idly by while the forces of the world try altering the gospel. Earnestly contend for the faith by defending the gospel.