

Galatians 1
July 3, 2022

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Imagine that you are called to serve as a missionary. You head to the mission field to do your work, and you experience great joy in reaching many with the gospel of grace. You watch people turn their lives over to Christ, and you come along beside them as new believers to help them get grounded in their newfound relationship to Jesus. Then it's time for you to move on. You have done your work in that mission field.

Suppose you get back to your home base and learn that after all the successful work you did, you discover that these new converts were being misled by another religious group who undermines the gospel you've been preaching....

Q: How do you think you'd feel? More importantly, what do you think you'd do about that? [Let people engage]

Transition: We are starting a 4-week series in Galatians, and we are going to find that Paul was in the very scenario I described earlier. He left the southern region of Galatia with joy over all the work he had done – only to learn that the Judaizers were misrepresenting the gospel to his new converts. The Judaizers were mixing a gospel of grace and the Law with it. As you can imagine, that was distressing to Paul, who led these Gentile converts to the Lord. Let's see how he defends the gospel. Would someone volunteer to read Galatians 1?

[Bible students are divided over whether Paul wrote to churches in the *country* of Galatia or in the *province* of Galatia. The former view is called the “north Galatian theory” and the latter the “south Galatian theory.” The matter is not finally settled, but the evidence seems to indicate that Paul wrote to churches in the southern part of the province of Galatia-Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe—churches he founded on his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14).]

BOOK:

1 Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers with me,

To the churches in Galatia:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

No Other Gospel

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even

if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Paul Called by God

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth (from my mother's womb) and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter (Greek Cephas) and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹ Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they praised God because of me.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

Paul had taught the Galatian Christians that their salvation depended solely on their faith in Jesus. This great gift was by the grace, the unmerited favor, of God. The Judaizers had come along to add another requirement: Gentile converts must become Jewish proselytes. The old and the new way must not be mixed. Salvation, by God's graciousness, is now free. It comes exclusively through faith in Jesus. He says, don't clutter up free grace with the old out-moded forms of gaining favor with God through the kinds of activities which the law required.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 282-286). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.*

BAD NEWS ABOUT THE GOOD NEWS

Galatians 1:1–10

The lad at my front door was trying to sell me a subscription to a weekly newspaper, and he was very persuasive. “It only costs a quarter a week,” he said, “and the best thing about this newspaper is that it prints only the good news!”

In a world filled with trouble, it is becoming more and more difficult to find any “good news,” so perhaps the newspaper was a bargain after all. To the person who has trusted Christ as Savior, the real “Good News” is the Gospel: “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ... He was buried, and ... He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:3–4). It is the Good News that sinners can be forgiven and go to heaven because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. The Good News of salvation through faith in Christ is the most important message in the world.

This message had changed Paul’s life and, through him, the lives of others. But now this message was being attacked, and Paul was out to defend the truth of the Gospel. Some false teachers had invaded the churches of Galatia—churches Paul had founded—and were teaching a different message from that which Paul had taught.

As you begin to read Paul’s letter to the Galatian Christians, you can tell immediately that something is radically wrong, because he does not open his letter with his usual praise to God and prayer for the saints. He has no time! Paul is about to engage in a battle for the truth of the Gospel and the liberty of the Christian life. False teachers are spreading a false “gospel” which is a mixture of Law and grace, and Paul is not going to stand by and do nothing.

How does Paul approach the Galatian Christians in his attempt to teach them the truth about the Gospel? In these opening verses, the apostle takes three definite steps as he prepares to fight this battle.

He Explains His Authority (Gal. 1:1–5)

Later on in his letter, Paul will deal with the Galatians on the basis of affection (Gal. 4:12–20); but at the outset he is careful to let them know the authority he has from the Lord. He has three sources of authority.

His ministry (vv. 1–2). “Paul, an apostle.” In the early days of the church, God called special men to do special tasks. Among them were the *apostles*. The word means “one who is sent with a commission.” While He was ministering on earth, Jesus had many *disciples* (“learners”), and from these He selected 12 *Apostles* (Mark 3:13–19). Later, one of the requirements for an apostle was that he have witnessed the Resurrection (Acts 1:21–22; 2:32; 3:15). Of course, Paul himself was neither a disciple nor an apostle during Christ’s earthly ministry, but he had seen the risen Lord and been commissioned by Him (Acts 9:1–18; 1 Cor. 9:1).

Paul’s miraculous conversion and call to apostleship created some problems. From the very beginning, he was apart from the original Apostles. His enemies said that he was not a true apostle for this reason. Paul is careful to point out that he had been made an apostle by Jesus

Christ just as much as had the original Twelve. His apostleship was not from human selection and approval, but by divine appointment. Therefore, he had the authority to deal with the problems in the Galatian churches.

But in his ministry, Paul had a second basis for authority: *he had founded the churches in Galatia*. He was not writing to them as a stranger, but as the one who had brought them the message of life in the beginning! This letter reveals Paul's affection for these believers (see Gal. 4:12–19). Unfortunately, this affection was not being returned to him.

This matter of the founding of the Galatian churches has kept serious Bible students at work for many years. The problem stems from the meaning of the word *Galatia*. Several hundred years before the birth of Christ, some fierce tribes migrated from Gaul (modern France) into Asia Minor, and founded Galatia, which simply means “the country of the Gauls.” When the Romans reorganized the ancient world, they made Galatia a part of a larger province that included several other areas, and they called the entire province Galatia. So, back in Paul's day, when a person talked about Galatia, you could not be sure whether he meant the smaller country of Galatia or the larger Roman province.

Bible students are divided over whether Paul wrote to churches in the *country* of Galatia or in the *province* of Galatia. The former view is called the “north Galatian theory” and the latter the “south Galatian theory.” The matter is not finally settled, but the evidence seems to indicate that Paul wrote to churches in the southern part of the province of Galatia-Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe-churches he founded on his first missionary journey (Acts 13–14).

Paul always had a loving concern for his converts and a deep desire to see the churches he had founded glorify Christ (see Acts 15:36; 2 Cor. 11:28). He was not content to lead men and women to Christ and then abandon them. (For an example of his “after-care,” read 1 Thes. 2.)

When Paul heard that false teachers had begun to capture his converts and lead them astray, he was greatly concerned-and rightly so. After all, teaching new Christians how to live for Christ is as much a part of Christ's commission as winning them (Matt. 28:19–20). Sad to say, many of the Galatian Christians had turned away from Paul, their “spiritual father” in the Lord, and were now following legalistic teachers who were mixing Old Testament Law with the Gospel of God's grace. (We call these false teachers “Judaizers” because they were trying to entice Christians back into the Jewish religious system.)

So, Paul had a ministry as an apostle, and specifically as the founder of the Galatian churches. As such, he had the authority to deal with the problems in the churches. But there was a second source of authority.

His message (vv. 3–4). From the very beginning, Paul clearly states the message of the Gospel, because it was this message that the Judaizers were changing. The Gospel centers in a *Person*-Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This Person paid a *price*-He gave Himself to die on the cross. (You will discover that the cross is important in the Galatian letter, see 2:19–21; 3:1, 13; 4:5; 5:11, 24; 6:12–14.) Christ paid the price that He might achieve a *purpose*-delivering sinners from bondage.

“Liberty in Christ” is the dominant theme of Galatians. (Check the word *bondage* in 2:4; 4:3, 9, 24–25; 5:1.) The Judaizers wanted to lead the Christians out of the liberty of grace into the bondage of Law. Paul knew that bondage was not a part of the message of the Gospel, for Christ had died to set men free.

Paul's ministry and message were sources of spiritual authority.

His motive (v. 5). “To whom be glory forever and ever!” The false teachers were not ministering for the glory of Christ, but for their own glory (see Gal. 6:12–14). Like false teachers

today, the Judaizers were not busy winning lost people to Christ. Rather, they were stealing other men's converts and bragging about their statistics. But Paul's motive was pure and godly: he wanted to glorify Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor. 6:19–20; 10:31–33).

Paul has now explained his authority. He is ready for a second step as he begins this battle for the liberty of the Christian.

He Expresses His Anxiety (Gal. 1:6–7)

“I am amazed that you are so quickly moving away!” This is the first reason for Paul's anxiety: the Galatians were *deserting the grace of God*. (The verb indicates they were in the process of deserting and had not fully turned away.)

Paul strikes while the iron is hot. God had called them in His grace, and saved them from their sins. Now they are moving from grace back into Law. They are abandoning liberty for legalism! And they are doing it so quickly, without consulting Paul, their “spiritual father,” or giving time for the Holy Spirit to teach them. They have become infatuated with the religion of the Judaizers, just the way little children follow a stranger because he offers them candy.

“The grace of God” is a basic theme in this letter (Gal. 1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18). Grace is simply God's favor to undeserving sinners. The words “grace” and “gift” go together, because salvation is the gift of God through His grace (Eph. 2:8–10). The Galatian believers were not simply “changing religions” or “changing churches” but were actually abandoning the very grace of God! To make matters worse, they were deserting the very God of grace! God had called them and saved them; now they were deserting Him for human leaders who would bring them into bondage.

We must never forget that the Christian life is a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ. A man does not become a Christian merely by agreeing to a set of doctrines; he becomes a Christian by submitting to Christ and trusting Him (Rom. 11:6). You cannot mix grace and works, because the one excludes the other. Salvation is the gift of God's grace, purchased for us by Jesus Christ on the cross. To turn from grace to Law is to desert the God who saved us.

But they were guilty of another sin that gave Paul great anxiety: *they were perverting the Gospel of God*. The Judaizers claimed to be preaching “the Gospel,” but there cannot be two gospels, one centered in works and the other centered in grace. “They are not preaching another gospel,” writes Paul, “but a *different* message—one so different from the true Gospel that it is no gospel at all.” Like the cultists today, the Judaizers would say, “We believe in Jesus Christ—*but* we have something wonderful *to add* to what you already believe.” As if any man could “add” something better to the grace of God!

The word translated “pervert” in Galatians 1:7 is used only three times in the New Testament (Acts 2:20; Gal. 1:7; James 4:9). It means “to turn about, to change into an opposite character.” The word could be translated “to reverse.” In other words, the Judaizers had reversed the Gospel—they had turned it around and taken it back into the Law! Later in this letter, Paul explains how the Law was preparation for the coming of Christ, but the Judaizers had a different interpretation. To them, the Law and the Gospel went together. “Except ye be circumcised after the manner [Law] of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1).

What was this “deserting and perverting” doing to the Galatian Christians? It was troubling them (Gal. 1:7). This verb “trouble” carries with it the idea of perplexity, confusion, and unrest. You get some idea of the force of this word when you see how it is used in other places. “Trouble” describes the feelings of the disciples in the ship during the storm (Matt. 14:26). It also describes the feelings of King Herod when he heard that a new King had been born (Matt.

2:3). No wonder Paul was anxious for his converts: they were going through great agitation because of the false doctrines that had been brought to the churches. Grace always leads to peace (see Gal. 1:3), but the believers had deserted grace and therefore had no peace in their hearts.

Keep in mind that God's grace involves something more than man's salvation. We not only are saved by grace, but we are to live by grace (1 Cor. 15:10). We stand in grace; it is the foundation for the Christian life (Rom. 5:1–2). Grace gives us the strength we need to be victorious soldiers (2 Tim. 2:1–4). Grace enables us to suffer without complaining, and even to use that suffering for God's glory (2 Cor. 12:1–10). When a Christian turns away from living by God's grace, he must depend on his own power. This leads to failure and disappointment. This is what Paul means by "fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:4)—moving out of the sphere of grace into the sphere of Law, ceasing to depend on God's resources and depending on our own resources.

No wonder Paul was anxious. His friends in Christ were deserting the God of grace, perverting the grace of God, and reverting to living by the flesh and their own resources. They had begun their Christian lives in the Spirit, but now they were going to try to continue in the power of the flesh (Gal. 3:3).

Having explained his authority and expressed his anxiety, Paul now takes the third step.

He Exposes His Adversaries (Gal. 1:8–10)

"Make love, not war!" may have been a popular slogan, but it is not always feasible. Doctors must make war against disease and death; sanitary engineers must war against filth and pollution; legislators must war against injustice and crime. And they all fight *because of something they love!*

"Ye that love the Lord, hate evil" (Ps. 97:10). "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9). Paul waged war against the false teachers because he loved the truth, and because he loved those whom he had led to Christ. Like a loving father who guards his daughter until she is married, Paul watched over his converts lest they be seduced into sin (2 Cor. 11:1–4).

The Judaizers are identified by *the false gospel that they preached*. The test of a man's ministry is not popularity (Matt. 24:11), or miraculous signs and wonders (Matt. 24:23–24), but his faithfulness to the Word of God (see Isa. 8:20; 1 Tim. 4; 1 John 4:1–6; and note that 2 John 5–11 warns us not to encourage those who bring false doctrine). Christ had committed the Gospel to Paul (1 Cor. 15:1–8), and he, in turn, had committed it to other faithful servants (1 Tim. 1:11; 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:2). But the Judaizers had come along and substituted their false gospel for the true Gospel, and for this sin, Paul pronounced them accursed. The word he uses is *anathema*, which means "dedicated to destruction." (Read Acts 23:14 for a forceful illustration of the meaning of this word.) No matter who the preacher may be—an angel from heaven or even Paul himself—if he preaches any other gospel, he is accursed!

But there is a second characteristic of Paul's adversaries: *the false motives that they practiced*. His enemies accused Paul of being a compromiser and "adjusting" the Gospel to fit the Gentiles. Perhaps they twisted the meaning of Paul's statement, "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). They said, "When Paul is with the Jews, he lives like a Jew; but when he is with the Gentiles, he lives like the Gentiles. He is a man-pleaser, and therefore you cannot trust him!"

But in reality, it was the false teacher who was the man-pleaser. "These men are paying you special attention, but not sincerely," Paul wrote (Gal. 4:17). "They want to shut you off from me, so that you may keep on paying them special attention" (WMS). Later, Paul also exposes the false teachers as the compromisers, going back to Old Testament practices so that they would not be

persecuted by the Jewish people (Gal. 6:12–15). Paul was definitely *not* a man-pleaser. His *ministry* did not come from man (Gal. 1:1), nor did his *message* come from man (Gal. 1:12). Why, then, should he be afraid of men? Why should he seek to please men? His heart’s desire was to please Christ.

When Verdi produced his first opera in Florence, the composer stood by himself in the shadows and kept his eye on the face of one man in the audience—the great Rossini. It mattered not to Verdi whether the people in the hall were cheering him or jeering him; all he wanted was a smile of approval from the master musician. So it was with Paul. He knew what it was to suffer for the Gospel, but the approval or disapproval of men did not move him. “Therefore, also we have as our ambition . . . to be pleasing to Him” (2 Cor. 5:9, NASB). Paul wanted the approval of Christ.

The servant of God is constantly tempted to compromise in order to attract and please men. When D.L. Moody was preaching in England, a worker came to him on the platform and told him that a very important nobleman had come into the hall. “May the meeting be a blessing to him!” was Moody’s reply, and he preached just as before, without trying to impress anybody.

Paul was not a politician; he was an ambassador. His task was not to “play politics” but to proclaim a message. These Judaizers, on the other hand, were cowardly compromisers who mixed Law and grace, hoping to please both Jews and Gentiles, but never asking whether or not they were pleasing God.

We have noted three steps Paul took toward engaging these false teachers in battle: he explained his authority, expressed his anxiety, and exposed his adversaries. But how is he going to attack his enemies? What approach will he use to convince the Galatian believers that all they need is faith in God’s grace? A quick survey of the entire letter shows that Paul is a master defender of the Gospel. Take time to read the entire letter at one sitting, and, as you read, note the three approaches that Paul takes.

His first approach is *personal* (Gal. 1–2). He reviews his own personal experience with Jesus Christ and the message of the Gospel. He points out that he had received the Gospel independently, from the Lord and not from the 12 Apostles (Gal. 1:11–24), but that they had approved his message and his ministry (Gal. 2:1–10). Furthermore, Paul had even defended the Gospel when Peter, the leading apostle, had compromised his earlier stand (Gal. 2:11–21). The autobiographical section of the letter proves that Paul was not a “counterfeit apostle,” but that his message and ministry were true to the faith.

Galatians 3 and 4 are *doctrinal*, and in them Paul presents several arguments to establish that sinners are saved by faith and grace, not by works and Law. First he appeals to their own experiences (Gal. 3:1–5). Then he goes back to the Old Testament Law in Galatians 3:6–14 to show that even Abraham and the prophets understood salvation as being by grace through faith. Having mentioned the Law, Paul now explains why the Law was given originally (Gal. 3:15–4:18). He then uses the story of Sarah and Hagar to illustrate the relationship between Law and grace (Gal. 4:19–31).

The final two chapters of the letter are *practical* in emphasis, as Paul turns from argument to application. The Judaizers accused Paul of promoting lawlessness because he preached the Gospel of the grace of God; so in this section, Paul explains the relationship between the grace of God and practical Christian living. He shows that living by grace means liberty, not bondage (Gal. 5:1–12); depending on the Spirit, not the flesh (Gal. 5:13–26); living for others, not for self (Gal. 6:1–10); and living for the glory of God, not for man’s approval (Gal. 6:11–18). It is either one series of actions or the other—Law or grace—but it cannot be both.

Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Galatians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 589-592) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

I. Introduction (1:1–10).

A. *The salutation* (1:1–5).

1:1. The opening of the Galatian epistle is both typical and atypical. Though the salutation includes the usual identification of author and recipient together with a customary greeting, the usual expression of thanksgiving and praise for believers is totally absent. Further, there is an abruptness about the opening words which plunges the reader immediately into one of Paul's major concerns, namely, that his apostolic credentials had been challenged. Though not one of the original Twelve, **Paul** claimed equality with them as **an apostle**. The word *apostolos* connotes authority and refers to a person who has a right to speak for God as His representative or delegate.

Paul's apostleship did not originate with men (it was **not from men**), that is, he was not appointed an apostle by any official body such as the leaders in Jerusalem or Antioch. Neither did his apostleship originate with any one man, however important (**nor by man**) not even Ananias, who assisted Paul in Damascus (cf. Acts 9:10–17), nor Barnabas, who played a strategic role in opening doors of ministry for Paul in both Jerusalem and Antioch (cf. Acts 9:27; 11:25–26). Rather, Paul made the bold claim that his call was of heavenly origin, from **God the Father** and the risen Lord **Jesus Christ**. This is the only direct mention of the resurrection of Christ in the epistle. It emphasizes the importance of that event to Paul's apostleship, for he was not called during the earthly ministry of the Lord but by the resurrected Christ.

1:2. Joining with Paul in the sending, though not the writing, of this letter were **all the brothers with** him. These were the apostle's fellow workers, perhaps Barnabas as well as the prophets and teachers with whom Paul ministered in Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1). Mentioning these co-laborers emphasized the fact that the teachings of this epistle were not peculiar to Paul but were held in common with others.

The recipients of the letter were **the churches in Galatia**. (See map before Rom.) This was then a circular letter probably directed to the churches founded during the first missionary journey of Paul and located in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch.

1:3. The traditional Greek and Hebrew forms of greeting, **grace and peace**, were always used by Paul in his salutations to express the hope that the believing readers might be sustained by daily portions of these blessings. "Grace and peace" find their source in **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. (See the chart, "Paul's Introductions to His Epistles" at Rom. 1:1–7.)

1:4–5. Paul concluded his salutation with a magnificent statement regarding the work of Christ on the cross and its delivering power, another major emphasis of this epistle. Christ **gave Himself for our sins** (cf. 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 3:18). His death was voluntary and final. It satisfied God's righteous demands against sinners, reconciled people to God, and provided for human redemption. One purpose of Christ's death is **to rescue us from the present evil age**. The gospel is an emancipating message. It delivers believing sinners from the power of the present world system through the power of the indwelling Christ just as certainly as it delivers them from eternal judgment to come. Was Paul hinting that the Old Testament Law, so

strongly promoted by the Galatian legalizers, would be impotent to accomplish such great things?

In His redemptive work Christ accomplished **the will of ... God** (Gal. 1:4c; cf. Heb. 10:7–10). Further, in that obedience the Savior brought **glory** to God (Gal. 1:5; cf. John 17:1). Redeemed saints will in addition give glory to God **forever** because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

Thus, Paul had already drawn the lines of battle by touching on two vital concerns. He had affirmed his own apostleship and had declared that the basis of man's salvation lies solely in the work of Christ and not in any human works.

B. The denunciation (1:6–10)

Conspicuous by its absence is Paul's usual expression of thanksgiving to God for his readers. Instead, he vented his astonishment and anger over the Galatians' defection. When compared with the opening of 1 Corinthians this is even more striking, for despite the Corinthians' deep moral defection Paul nonetheless expressed commendation. But here in the face of theological departure he did not express thanks, thus emphasizing the more serious nature of doctrinal apostasy.

1:6–7. Paul's astonishment was over an almost inconceivable turn of events—the Galatian believers were in the process of turning away (**deserting**, *metatithesthe*, as in a military desertion) from the truth. Part of the apostle's amazement was because it was happening **so quickly** after his last visit to them, or so soon after the false teachers began their insidious work. The departure was not simply from a system of theology but from God Himself, **the One who had called them by the grace of Christ** (the dominant theme of the epistle). In exchange they were embracing **a different gospel**, one that was false. Paul insisted that a gospel of legalism which adds work to faith is not the same kind of gospel that he preached and by which they were saved. It was actually an attempt **to pervert the gospel of Christ**. And Paul was aware of the fact that at the very time he was writing this epistle the false teachers were at work troubling or **throwing** the Galatians **into confusion** (cf. Acts 15:24; 20:29–30).

1:8. To emphasize the fact that the true **gospel** of the grace of God cannot be changed, Paul first stated a hypothetical case. **If** he (a divinely called apostle) **or an angel** (a heavenly messenger) were to alter the gospel message—a highly improbable situation—then **let him be accursed or eternally condemned** (*anathema*).

1:9. In this verse Paul seemed to repeat himself, but he actually advanced his thought. Paul and Barnabas had given a warning of judgment when they had preached to the Galatians. Now Paul repeated it. A zealous champion of the purity of the gospel of grace, Paul said it again: **If anybody** were **preaching** a different **gospel** (which the false teachers were), he would come under God's eternal judgment. It is not difficult to understand why Paul reacted so strongly, because the Judaizers were impugning the Cross; for if works were necessary for salvation, then the work of Christ was not sufficient (cf. 2:21). Furthermore, a great deal is at stake for lost people. When the gospel message is corrupted, the way of salvation is confused, and people are in danger of being eternally lost.

1:10. Apparently the Judaizers had charged Paul with teaching freedom from the Law in order to curry the Gentiles' favor. But the tone of this letter, specifically the harsh language Paul had just used, was hardly calculated **to win the approval of men**. Men-pleasers simply do not hurl *anathemas* against those who proclaim false gospels. Indeed, if the apostle had wanted **to please men**, he would have remained a zealous Pharisee and promoter of the Law rather than

becoming a **servant of Christ**. Elsewhere Paul affirmed his purpose to please God, not men (cf. 6:12; 1 Thess. 2:4).

II. Personal: A Defense of Paul's Authority (1:11–2:21)

Paul then took up in more detail the challenge to his authority as an apostle. Was he a self-appointed impostor? Arguing autobiographically, Paul declared that (a) he was an apostle before he met the other apostles; (b) when he did meet them he was received as an equal; (c) and he even found it necessary to rebuke Peter, the reputed chief apostle.

A. *He was independent of the apostles (1:11–24).*

1. THESIS: PAUL'S GOSPEL WAS A REVELATION (1:11–12).

1:11–12. First, Paul certified that **the gospel** did not originate with **man**. Man-made religions emphasize human merit and the necessity of human works for salvation. Paul's message did not. Second, the apostle declared that he **did not receive** the gospel from any human source. Though he heard Stephen preach and had personal contacts with Ananias and Barnabas, he was not indebted to them for his knowledge of spiritual truth. Third, Paul affirmed he did not receive the gospel he preached by means of some course of instruction. Even though that was the way the Galatians received the gospel (as Paul had instructed them), the apostle on the other hand **received it by revelation from Jesus Christ**. This was the highest authority. How then could the Galatians question his authority and message? And how did they dare deviate from this divinely revealed truth?

2. EVENTS BEFORE PAUL'S CONVERSION (1:13–14).

1:13–14. By appealing to his personal history Paul established beyond any doubt that he did not learn his gospel from men. Beginning with his pre-conversion life, he showed that his only relationship to the church was that of a fanatic persecutor of it. Standing before Herod Agrippa II, Paul summarized his frenzied oppression of Christians (cf. Acts 26:9–11). Coupled with this was the fact that he was also zealous to advance as a Pharisee **in Judaism**. He felt driven to excel over other **Jews** his **own age**. He loved the Law and was **zealous for the traditions of his fathers**. He no doubt spent much time studying the Law of Moses and the accompanying Rabbinical traditions. Thus, who could accuse Paul of not being acquainted with the teachings of Judaism when he knew them better than the Judaizers?

3. EVENTS AT PAUL'S CONVERSION (1:15–16a).

1:15–16a. The contrast with the preceding (vv. 13–14) is striking and is occasioned by God's intervention in the life of Saul of Tarsus: **But ... God**. Nowhere is this intervention more graphically described than in Acts 9. Here Paul simply enumerated three things God did for him. First, God **set him apart from birth**. Paul knew that God had providentially set him apart from birth and that all his life to this point was a preparation for his ministry as a proclaimer of the gospel of God's grace. Second, God **called Paul by His grace**. This is a reference to the time of Paul's salvation. He responded to God's efficacious call and received Jesus Christ as Savior. In Romans (8:30) Paul gave the sequence of God's work in salvation: "Those He predestined, He

also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.” Third, God **was pleased to reveal His Son in Paul**. Blinded as he had been to the deity of Jesus Christ and thinking that the Nazarene was a fraud, God gave Paul an outward vision of Christ on the Damascus Road and later an inner revelation concerning the full significance of the person and work of the Savior. The purpose of this revelation was that Paul **might preach Him among the Gentiles**. The Book of Acts gives full account of Paul’s ministry to the non-Jewish world on his missionary journeys. He became known as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:15; 13:46–47; 26:20; Rom. 11:13; 15:16; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:7). Thus, Paul emphasized that both his conversion and his commission owed nothing to man but were of God. How else could such a transformation—from persecutor to preacher—be explained?

4. EVENTS AFTER PAUL’S CONVERSION (1:16b–24).

1:16b–17. Paul had emphasized that he did not receive his message from men before or at the time of his conversion. Now he affirmed that he was free from human influences afterward as well. Though Paul met other Christians after his conversion he did not **consult** them on doctrine. If he had been uncertain about the gospel, he could readily have gone **to Jerusalem** for a seminar with the **apostles**, but he did not. Rather he **went immediately into Arabia**. It is doubtful that he went there to evangelize but rather to be away from men and alone with the Lord for personal study, meditation, and to receive further revelation. This zealous student of the Law now pondered the meaning of his conversion and looked for the things concerning Christ in the Old Testament (cf. Luke 24:27). The product of these days in Arabia was the Christian theology that Paul explained in his epistle to the Romans.

The point of Paul’s declaration is clear. He formed his theology not by consulting with others, but independently as he sought God’s guidance.

1:18–20. Paul then reinforced his previous argument by asserting that he waited **three years** after his conversion to go **to Jerusalem**, time that was spent in Arabia and Damascus (v. 17). Would he have waited that long if he had needed theological instruction from the disciples? When he did go, it was **to get acquainted with Peter**, that is, it was a personal visit lasting only **15 days**. Paul then left because of a plot against his life (cf. Acts 9:29). Meanwhile Paul had had a meaningful time coming to know the noted apostle, but there is no suggestion that Peter gave him theological instruction or apostolic endorsement for his ministry. Of the rest of the apostles Paul met only **James, the Lord’s brother**, a leader in the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 12:17). To stress the truth of what he had just said—no doubt in the face of a Judaizer’s charge that he had misrepresented his relationship to the apostles—Paul put himself on oath, calling God to be his witness that he was telling the truth.

1:21–22. After his abbreviated visit in Jerusalem Paul worked for an extended time in **Syria and Cilicia**, which is why he **was personally unknown to the churches of Judea** (cf. Acts 9:30; 11:25). He was not commissioned for this ministry by the apostles, and because of the distance between him and Jerusalem he could not have been under their authority or subject to their oversight.

1:23–24. The churches in Judea by this time had almost forgotten Paul. The only **report** they had recently **heard** was that this one who had once **persecuted** the church was **now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy**. This would of course include the doctrine of justification by faith apart from circumcision or works. And in the face of this report the Judean believers **praised God because of Paul**. This was a telling blow to the false teachers. The Jewish Christians in Judea rejoiced in the same gospel the Judaizers sought to undermine.

Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 568-570). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

SALUTATION AND PREVIEW (1:1–5)

Like the introduction of most letters in the New Testament era, the name of the writer (“Paul”) and readers (“The churches of Galatia”) are given, as well as Paul’s standard greeting (“Grace to you and peace”). There are also several distinctive elements that are linked to the development of thought in the rest of the epistle. For example, the resurrection of Christ is mentioned only here, then assumed throughout the letter. Also, the capsule summary of the gospel in terms of redemption and deliverance from “this present evil age” is uniquely worded, though similar thought patterns emerge later in Galatians. Paul’s divinely granted apostleship will become the first theme developed at length in the body of the letter (1:10–2:14).

ERROR (1:6–9)

Paul was astounded that so soon after his ministry among the Galatians they had defected from the gospel of grace in Christ. To turn away from Paul’s message was, in effect, to turn away from God and to turn to a perversion of the true gospel. It was being passed off by the false teachers as an alternate gospel but was, in reality, merely a confusing counterfeit. Paul was so concerned by this development that he twice pronounced a curse (“anathema”) on any being, including an angel, distorting the gospel among his readers.

APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (1:10–2:14)

The apostle was well aware that his strong criticism would be unpopular with his readers. It was not his intention to be a people pleaser but to please God and to serve Christ, from whom he received his gospel message by direct revelation on the Damascus Road (Acts 26:12–18).

To back his authority as an apostle (1:1) and to show that he had wrestled with the issue of the gospel of grace repeatedly before, Paul presented a selective overview of his own experience. First, he recalled his own misguided zeal for the Jewish law and traditions and his intense persecution of the church. Certainly no one among the Galatian churches, or even the Jewish false teachers, could rival the unsaved Paul’s works, if that were the true issue of the gospel (Phil. 3:4–6).

Fields, W. C. (1972). Galatians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher’s Bible Commentary (pp. 741–743). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

Paul’s Introduction (Gal. 1:1–5)

The letter opens abruptly without the cordiality expressed in his other letters. It contains no commendation, no thanksgiving or prayer for them. Compare the introduction to Philippians. In both letters to the believers at Corinth he rejoices over them in spite of their bickering and partisanship. But not here!

Paul immediately states the two main issues: (1) his authority as a divinely appointed apostle, and (2) faith as the only basis for salvation. Apparently, his enemies, the Judaizers, had

attempted to undermine his teachings by telling the Galatian churches that Paul was not one of the twelve and therefore not a true apostle. At the outset he asserts his direct commission from Christ. This is an allusion to his vision on the way to Damascus and to other divinely given instructions. His call came not from human beings but from God.

Having made this important point regarding the authority of his teaching, he moves quickly to the attack. The churches in Galatia had made a grave mistake in accepting the propaganda of the Judaizers. His entirely human exasperation shows through. Paul quickly saw that some important questions were hanging in the balance. Was Christianity destined to be merely a reform movement in Judaism? Was it to be chained to Judaism and oriented to Jerusalem? Or was it to be a forward-looking movement, outward bound into all the world?

Paul saw clearly that the first course would mean the eventual death and disappearance of the gospel of Christ. To make an impact on the pagan Gentile world, the gospel must be freed from Old Testament dietary regulation, circumcision, and the restrictive odds and ends of Jewish law. One of the most hotly debated issues of the early church was shaping up. Would Judaism capture and tame the followers of Jesus? Paul was convinced that this was not the divine intention. He could not go in person to these churches at that time, so he sends this historic letter.

Astonishment at Their Fickleness (Gal. 1:6–9)

The passage—Paul had taught the Galatian Christians that their salvation depended solely on their faith in Jesus. This great gift was by the grace, the unmerited favor, of God. The Judaizers had come along to add another requirement: Gentile converts must become Jewish proselytes. Paul’s anxiety and anger arose over the quick acceptance by these Galatian believers of this additional, unnecessary requirement. In fact, he says, this unwarranted Jewishness twists and perverts the gospel. It is a backward step. It is a retreat, a defection. Whoever preaches such a false gospel, “may he be condemned to hell!” (1:8–9, TEV). The strong language conveys his estimate of the danger of such a heresy.

Special point—In Paul’s view, the ceremonial law was a preliminary, elementary stage of religious development. It is now outdated and must be surpassed by a new way of relating to God. This new, more adequate, more mature way of relating to God is totally different. The old and the new way must not be mixed. Salvation, by God’s graciousness, is now free. It comes exclusively through faith in Jesus. He says, don’t clutter up free grace with the old out-moded forms of gaining favor with God through the kinds of activities which the law required.

Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority (Gal. 1:10–2:21)

The passage—Paul reviews the events of his life to show God’s authority in what he is teaching and preaching. God revealed to him that the way of faith has now replaced the requirements of Old Testament laws. This truth did not come to him from any of the apostles. It came through divine revelation. Indeed, the apostles confirmed his work among the Gentiles. They gave approval (“the right hands of fellowship”) to him and his partner, Barnabas. They did not require Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised and become a Jewish proselyte.

The debate on this point indicated in chapter 2 may be the same one which occurred in Jerusalem as described in Acts 15. That discussion ended with Paul having a clear assignment to work among the Gentiles even as Peter and some of the others were to continue witnessing among the Jews.

Thus, Paul claims both human and divine sanction for his teaching that Gentiles are freely saved and fully Christian without going through the motions of Jewish ceremonial law.

Roberts, P. R. (2007). Are Scientology and the Bible Compatible? In T. Cabal, C. O. Brand, E. R. Clendenen, P. Copan, & J. P. Moreland (Eds.), The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (p. 1752). Holman Bible Publishers.

1:1 While opponents appealed to rabbinical authority chains (“Rabbi So-and-so said ...”), Paul contrasted his apostleship’s source (from God, not men) and means (through Messiah Jesus, not man).

1:4 The true gospel results in a lifestyle delivered from the powers of this present evil age (i.e., freed from Satan’s and sin’s control; see chaps. 5–6).

1:6–10 God’s good news—the gospel—makes Him our Father (v. 3) and delivers us from sin’s tyranny (v. 4). Unfortunately, disturbers and distorters of this good news (v. 7) persuade others to desert God, who gives such grace through Christ (v. 6). They preach a different (*heteros*) gospel (v. 6) since there is no other (*allos*) gospel of the same kind (v. 7). Distorting the real gospel with a false gospel is worthy of damnation (*anathema*) in vv. 8–9 because of its everlastingly destructive consequences. In Galatians this distortion restricted entrance to salvation by Judaizing—adding traditional Jewish requirements, such as circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath keeping, to Christ’s all-sufficient provision.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Galatians 1). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.