

Galatians – Lesson 2

The Thesis of the Letter

Read Galatians 1:1-10

- (a) According to 1:1-2, what is the *basis* for Paul's authority to write to the Galatians? Why does he appeal to *this* particular authority, rather than just his *personal* connection to them?

Paul appeals to his authority as an *apostle*; a representative of Christ Jesus himself. Because he was commissioned *directly* by Jesus, Paul can assert that his authority is *delegated* directly from Christ, making his commands equally as powerful as the Lord's. Paul chooses this path because his personal connection to them *would not be sufficient*; because he is dealing with matters of *extreme doctrinal importance*, he must express himself with an authority *greater* than just his "friendship" with them.

- (b) What is *unique* about the salutation that Paul gives in 1:3-5 (as compared to others in his letters)?

Paul *combines* in this salutation both a greeting *and* a *doxology*, not only giving glory to God the Father, but to note that Christ "*gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age.*" In a sense, Paul argues his point *in the salutation*, getting right to the heart of the matter.

- (c) What is *missing* from this letter (between 1:5 and 1:6) that is so *prevalent* in his other letters? Why do you think it is missing? What does it tell you about the *tone* of the letter?

Paul includes *no* "thanksgiving" section in the letter, as he does in most of his others; he does not praise the Galatians for their faithfulness nor does he express how often he prays for them. There may be two (2) reasons for this missing section: 1) because Paul is *not* (in fact!) thankful for them, as the letter will clearly point out (i.e., their failure to keep the true gospel is not something worth being thankful), and/or 2) because Paul just wants to get *quickly* to the point, skipping over the "small talk" to get to the heart of the matter. Frankly, this omission clearly shows the letter to have a *serious* overtone, even somewhat *harsh*; making no initial comments about what they *are* doing well makes the letter quite strong.

- (a) *Who* does Paul contend, in 1:6, that the Galatians are "so quickly deserting?"

Paul notes that the Galatians are (in fact!) deserting the one "*who called you in the grace of Christ*", not just the gospel itself. This is, in Paul's estimation, an *abandonment* of either 1) him, as the evangelist who had preached the gospel of grace to them, or 2) the Spirit of God who had brought them to faith in the gospel of grace (or both!). In other words, Paul is *not* initially concerned that they were abandoning a "something", but a "someone" (i.e., someone who had poured out a message of grace to them, which they were now abandoning), which would be *very personal*.

- (b) What does the term "*astonished*" imply about how Paul is feeling at this moment? What *synonyms* to this word would better explain its *intensity*?

Astonished is simple word for *unexpectedly surprised*, seeing something happen that *should not have been* and feeling a sense of *bewilderment* as to why it has. Possibly the word could include feelings of *ire*, *fury*, or *extreme disappointment*. Paul *cannot believe* what he is hearing from the Galatian churches, and it raises up great anger within him.

3. (a) Explain the phrase “a *different gospel*”, to which the Galatians were turning. Based *only* on what you know *so far* in this letter (for example, see 1:3-5), what is *different* in this “*different*” gospel?

To imply that something is “*different*” is to say that it is *twisted from the original*; not something *completely different* (e.g., as red is to blue), but a *variation* on the original that changes it significantly enough to make it “something else” (e.g., as red is to maroon). The Galatians were embracing a “gospel” that was *slightly altered*. It still presumed Jesus as the Christ, and was distinct from pure Judaism by virtue of the belief that he was raised from the dead and is now the Messiah. But, it embraced beliefs that corrupted the *main point* of the message of salvation itself: the “new” gospel insisted that one must adhere to Jewish religious customs and practices (including circumcision) in order to *be a Christian*. It “modified” the gospel Paul had preached in Galatia by “adding” Jewish requirements for Gentile believers (and asserted those *same* practices for Jewish ones). In other words, it was *no longer a gospel of grace*; it asserted that *ritual was necessary for salvation rather than simple faith in Christ*, who had rescued his people “*from this present evil age*”.

- (b) From the Introduction lecture last week, who were the “*some who trouble you*” (in v. 7)?

It is likely that *Judaizers* had arrived in Galatia to pervert the gospel message from pure faith in Christ to Jewish ritualism and custom-practice as a part of what it meant to be a Christian. Men who insisted that Christianity was *simply another sect of Judaism*, and that Gentile believers must become *proselytes* to Judaism in order to be a part of this new sect.

- (c) What does the word “*accursed*” mean in 1:8-9. What does this imply about the *seriousness* of Paul’s charges against the Galatians?

Accursed means to be damned, to be cast away from the presence of God as unholy. To be accursed means to bear the mark of evil, to be condemned by God himself and to be thrown out to be destroyed. Paul levels this *indictment* upon any who preach a gospel *contrary* to the gospel of faith alone in Christ alone, even if that should be an angel from heaven *or one of his own team* (including himself!). Obviously, Paul believes that the gospel is *so important* that he *excommunicates* anyone who would alter that message; he is so *dead serious* about being sure that everyone understands the significance of this issue that he calls down *curses* upon any who dare to defy him.

- (d) Based on the phrase “*even if we or an angel from heaven*”, what does this imply about Paul’s understanding of *his own gospel message*? Why can Paul have such *confidence* in himself?

Paul believed *absolutely* that the gospel he proclaimed in Galatia was 100% approved by Christ Jesus himself; he was *certain* that he possessed the *fullness* of the gospel message, *having received it from Christ himself* (something he will imply later in the letter). To call down curses on *anyone* (including an angelic messenger) that would alter the message implies that Paul was *absolutely certain* that he knew what the gospel was *and preached it faithfully*.

4. (a) Explain Paul’s *rhetorical* question in v. 10? What does he mean by “*approval?*”

Paul is simply asking this question: is his *response* to their “embracing” of a false gospel designed to win him friends? Will Paul get the “*approval*” of men if he *confronts* the false teachers twisting the gospel? The answer is obvious (thus the question is rhetorical): *no!* Attempting to *right* the message in the hearts and minds of the Galatians will only *stir up trouble for him*, but it is (nonetheless!) the right thing to do; he *must* pursue the purity of the gospel in and around them *regardless* of whether he loses “friends” in the process. In other words, Paul is simply noting that his attempt *here* to recover the gospel is not to “please men”, but to please Christ, who gave him the message and who *covets* its purity in the church.

(b) What are some ways that Christians have attempted to “please man” with the gospel?

The most *obvious* way that preachers attempt to “please men” with the “gospel” is to make it *more palatable* to the tastes of unbelievers; modifying the *core requirements* of the message in order for it to be “easier” to receive and believe. Namely, removing the concepts of *sin*, the need for *repentance*, the need for *self-sacrifice*, and the requirements of *laying down one’s life* for Christ. Then, substituting things like “easy-believism” for genuine faith, denying the lordship of Christ over all of life or the seeking of sanctification (holiness) as the point of being born again. In other words, to “please men” with the gospel, many have simply *watered it down* so that it has no power to save, and then “feeding” it to goats, assuring them that they are now “saved” by their profession, even if their life continues on the same trajectory towards hell.

5. From 1:3-10, write Paul’s *thesis* for this letter. What is the *point* he will be making in rest of the letter?

Paul’s thesis is simple: the gospel of Jesus Christ, which he had delivered to the Galatians, had been perverted by troublemakers into a gospel that could no longer deliver a believer from this present evil age, of which the Galatians believers had embraced. The point, then, of the rest of this letter is to *demonstrate why* the “new” gospel was wrong, and why it was essential for the Galatian believers to embrace the true one.