

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON NINE)

“THE GOSPEL IS A REVELATION”

GALATIANS 1:10-12

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

10 Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!

11 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin.

12 For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

In our previous Lesson, we considered Paul condemnation in verses **8** and **9** of any human being (including himself), or of an angel from heaven, who proclaimed a gospel contrary to the one which he had preached to the Galatians and which they had received.

In both verses, Paul issues a command in the **present imperative**. It is a command that those who are propagating a false gospel be eternally condemned to hell.

In verse **10**, he writes, “*Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!*”

In this verse, Paul seeks to justify the severity of his expression in verses **8** and **9**. It is apparent that the apostle feels that the condemnation which he had twice pronounced on those who preached a contrary gospel to the Gospel of grace which he preached, might strike his readers as being unduly harsh. He therefore introduces an explanatory justification of his stern language. He says that he would not have uttered the repeated condemnation had he been more concerned about the approval of human beings than he was about the approval of God.

By the use of the word “*now*,” he argues that at that critical moment when the Galatian believers were being led astray by the false doctrines of the **Judaizers**, and when a demonically orchestrated attack was being launched against the Gospel, there was no way that he could seek to please men rather than God. The severity of his language proves that he is not trying to gain the approval of people.

The **Judaizers** accused Paul of being a compromiser who “tailored” the Gospel to fit the Gentiles. Perhaps they twisted the meaning of his statement in **1 Corinthians 9:22**, “*I have become all things to all people, so that by all means I may save some,*” to label him a “people-pleaser.” But in reality, it was the **Judaizers** who were the people-pleasers. They taught circumcision and the strict observance of the law to keep from being persecuted by their fellow Jews who had not embraced Christianity.

Todd Wilson makes the following insightful comments:

“People-pleasers don’t make good servants of Christ because people-pleasers cave under pressure from influential people...People-pleasers hide from the shame of the cross...Do you know what the root of the problem with people-pleasers is? The root of the problem is that people-pleasers are idolaters. People-pleasers make idols of other people and thus crave their approval as though it were the bread of life. But in idolizing other people and their approval, they ultimately idolize themselves. They make idols of themselves and thus require the

approval of others as though it were an offering being given to a god. People-pleasing is a kind of self-worship. It is the antithesis of being a servant of Christ Jesus....if we're going to fight the temptation to people-please, we must also come to really believe that God's judgment is the only one that counts."

Paul's questions, "*Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people?*" are of course, rhetorical. He is obviously not striving to please human beings or gain their approval! Everything He did was with the perspective that God was His audience, an audience of One! Paul was clearly not concerned about his **Approval Ratings** like so many preachers are today! As one commentator observed, "There have always been preachers who have sought popular acclaim above all else, and there are some still. It is part of fallen human nature that even those charged with the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel can fall into the trap of trying to be popular rather than faithful."

While Paul was willing to become all things to all people, so that by all means he might save some, he would never do so by compromising one jot or tittle of Scripture.

Paul says, "*If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!*"

The words "*to please*" are the translation of a Greek word which means, "to accommodate oneself to the opinions, desires and interests of others." Paul asks the Galatian believers in effect, "Do you think I am trying to please men or God? If indeed I was trying to be a people-pleaser I, like the **Judaizers**, would be preaching a message of works. By so doing I would avoid all the persecution I am now enduring for the Gospel's sake."

In chapter **6** and verses **12-14**, Paul returned to this issue. He writes,

12 Those who want to make a good showing in external matters are trying to force you to be circumcised. They do so only to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

13 For those who are circumcised do not obey the law themselves, but they want you to be circumcised so that they can boast about your flesh.

14 But may I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.
(New English Translation)

Paul knew what it was to suffer for the Gospel, but the approval or disapproval of men did not move him. The only One whose approval Paul desired was Christ. In **2 Corinthians 5:9** he wrote, “*So then whether we are alive or away, we make it our ambition to please him*”
(New English Translation).

The word “*slave*” is a translation of the Greek word **doulos**: (**doo’-los**), which refers to a slave, a bondman, a man of servile condition. It is very unfortunate that many English translations of the Bible fail to give this word its true meaning, translating it as “servant” instead of “slave.”

The word **doulos** was used in the first century as a designation of a class of slaves that represented a most abject, servile condition. It referred to one who was born into his or her condition of slavery, one who was bound to his or her master as his or her slave, one who was in a permanent relationship to his or her master, which relationship could only be broken by death, one whose will was swallowed up in the will of his or her master, and one who served his or her master even to the extent that he or she disregarded his or her own interests.

Paul regarded himself as being bound to Jesus Christ with the chains of a constraining love. Paul was born into slavery to sin by his first birth, and he was born into slavery to the Lord Jesus by his new birth. Paul’s relation to Satan was broken by his identification with Christ in His death. He was now in a relation to Jesus Christ which would last forever,

since Christ can never die again, and Paul's life is Christ. Before he was saved, Paul's will was swallowed up in the will of Satan. After he was saved, his will was swallowed up in the sweet will of God. Before his conversion Paul had served Satan to the detriment of his own interests. Since his conversion, he had served the Lord Jesus with a reckless abandon, not regarding his own interests.

Brothers and sisters, if we are indeed the “*slaves*” of Jesus Christ then our lives are not our own. We belong entirely to Him! And if we belong entirely to Jesus Christ and relate to Him as true bond-slaves, we will find that we will not be popular with others, because our focus is not on pleasing them, but on pleasing our Master.

With verse **11**, we come to a new section of the letter. In this section, Paul relates his personal experiences to his readers in an effort to defend his right to preach the Gospel of grace. In order for him to vindicate his message it is necessary for him to first vindicate his apostleship. He writes, “*Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the Gospel I preached is not of human origin*” (**New English Translation**).

The words, “*want you to know,*” are a translation of the Greek word **gnórizó**: (**gno-rid'-zo**), which means, “to make known; to become known, be recognized.” The word was used to introduce matters of great importance. Paul is defending his authority as an apostle and the authenticity of his message and so he uses this emphatic word so as to leave no doubt that what follows is the truth.

While the word generally means “to make known,” in this context, it has the force of reminding the Galatians in an emphatic way of what they already knew and had been convinced of. The Galatians already knew the facts which Paul presents in verses **11** and **12**. The idea of the phrase is “Let me make this perfectly clear.” Paul wants to leave no doubt in the minds of the Galatian believers that the Gospel that he had preached to them did not come from men but from God, and as such had absolutely no mixture of human wisdom. It did not even have a hint of the effort of

human beings playing any part in the righteousness that God provided. It was the “certified” gospel!

Paul calls the believers “*brothers and sisters.*” The words are the translation of a Greek word which literally means, “From the same womb.” The use of the word is a most tender touch on the part of the apostle. Both Paul and the Galatian believers found the source of their regenerated lives in the work of the Holy Spirit, and thus were children of the same heavenly Father.

Paul emphatically states that the Gospel that he preached to them “*is not of human origin.*” Paul’s use of the present tense (*is*), clearly indicates the permanence and unchangeableness of the Gospel of grace.

The Greek word translated “*not*” is **ou**, which is the strongest adverb to negate an allegation. Paul is categorically stating that, the gospel he preaches is absolutely not a human invention. He did not invent or alter it. It is not according to a human standard and is not even in harmony with ideas of men! Indeed, human wisdom could never have come up with such a message. By implication, Paul is claiming that His Gospel is completely divine in origin, and as such it counters all the theories of salvation contrived by the fleshly wisdom of fallen unregenerate human beings, who in some shape or form always add works as a means of attaining salvation. Both Paul’s mission and his message are independent of human beings since both were received by directly from God.

Commenting on this verse, **John MacArthur** makes the following remarks: “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...Man’s sinful pride is offended by the idea that only God’s mercy and grace can save him from sin, and he therefore insists on having a part in his own salvation. The very fact that Paul preached a message of salvation in

which works play absolutely no part was itself evidence that his message was from God and not...man."

The **Judaizers** knew that if they could undermine Paul's apostolic authority they could defeat his message of liberty. So Paul now defends his apostleship and message. The **Judaizers** claimed that Paul perverted the Gospel by omitting the Law of Moses; in reality, it was the **Judaizers** who perverted the Gospel by adding legalism to it. In verse **11** Paul presents the first reason why the Galatians should listen to him instead of the **Judaizers**: The Gospel is not man-made. No human mind apart from God's revelation would dream up a plan of salvation wholly dependent on God's grace and the death of his Son!

In verse **12**, Paul argues that the Gospel of grace is not **conceived** by human beings, but rather is **received** by them! He writes, "*For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

The word "*I*" at the beginning of the verse, is a translation of the Greek word **ego**: (**eg-o'**), which is a primary pronoun of the first person **I**. It is only expressed when emphatic. Paul uses the personal pronoun here to show that he is laying emphasis upon the special education he had received for his ministry of the Gospel. He had not, like his converts, learnt it from human teachers, but by direct communion with God, as the twelve original apostles had learnt it from Christ's teaching. Paul is very carefully here to show his independence of the Twelve. It is obvious that the **Judaizers** had called into question Paul's apostolic commission, declaring it to be inferior to that of the Twelve. It is clear that Paul had this in mind when he wrote the letter.

The reason why Paul dares to refer to the Gospel as, "My Gospel" (**Romans 2:16, 16:25** and **2 Timothy 2:8**), is not because he had made it up but because it had been uniquely revealed to him by God. The magnitude of his claim is remarkable. He is affirming that the Gospel message is not his message but God's message, that his words are not his words but God's words.

Paul categorically states that he did not receive the Gospel from a human source. He says, “*I did not receive it or learn it from any human source.*” These were the methods by which the majority of the believers and even the teachers of the believers had received the Gospel. But these were not the methods by which Paul received it. His case was exceptional. He received it “*by a revelation of Jesus Christ.*”

The Greek word translated “*by*” is **dia** which is a preposition expressing the intermediate agent of an action, in this case the intermediate agent is Jesus Christ, and the action is Paul’s reception of the revelation. In other words, it was the Lord Jesus Christ Himself who revealed the message of the Gospel and all of its wonderful implications to Paul.

The word “*revelation*” is a translation of the Greek word **apokalupsis**: (**ap-ok-al’-oop-sis**), which originally referred primarily to the removal of that which conceals, and therefore, to an uncovering. It conveys the idea of removing the cover and exposing to open view that which was not visible, known or disclosed. As it is used in Scripture, the word refers to the act of God uncovering or revealing Scriptural truth which is incapable of otherwise being discovered by the reason of human beings. This revelation is accompanied by the imparted ability to understand what is uncovered. In this case it was the Gospel which had been a mystery to Paul until he had been regenerated and given specific revelation from Jesus Christ.

The gospel is not an invention, or a tradition, but a revelation. The gospel was not grasped by Paul’s intellect, or attained by his moral power. Rather it was by revelation, a sovereign work of God in unveiling the truth to him. What Paul received was a direct communication of the mind of God! How then could the Galatians question Paul’s authority and the authenticity of the Gospel he proclaimed?

The words “*of Jesus Christ*” are in a construction in the Greek which indicates clearly that Jesus Christ is the One acting in the revelation. He is the One who did the revealing.

The time of this revelation of the Gospel of grace to Paul was in all probability during his sojourn in Arabia (**Galatians 1:15-17**).

We will conclude our Lesson this evening with a quote from the American theologian **Philip Ryken**: “Not surprisingly, the religions that human beings invent always end up glorifying human beings. There is some law to keep, some teaching to follow, some ritual to perform, some penance to endure, or some state of consciousness to achieve that will bring salvation. One way or another, we can climb up to heaven and reach God. Christianity is different. What distinguishes it from other world religions is that it actually comes from God. The one true gospel is not man-made, which is why it gives all the glory to God. The good news of the cross and the empty tomb could come only from God because it is about what God has done to save us through Jesus Christ. It does not teach that we can reach up to heaven; it teaches that God has come down to earth. In Christ, God has entered human history and the human heart.”