

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON TWO)

GALATIANS 1:1

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

1 From Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor by human agency, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead)

As we begin reading the opening words of Paul's letter to the Galatian believers, we immediately recognize that he is in a combative mood! As one commentator says, "In this letter, Paul went to the very fort of legalism and through closely reasoned biblical logic destroyed its errors. His bold defense of grace restored the Galatians and saved the early church from a cultic division."

The American New Testament scholar **William Hendriksen** in his introduction to **Galatians** makes the following dramatic comments:

"The spiritual atmosphere is charged. It is sultry, sweltering. A storm is threatening. The sky is darkening. In the distance one can see flashes of lightning; one can hear faint muttering sounds. When each line of **Galatians 1:1-5** is read in the light of the letter's occasion and purpose the atmospheric turbulence is immediately detected. The apostle, though in perfect control of himself, for he is writing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, is greatly agitated, deeply moved. His heart and mind are filled with a medley of emotions. For the perverters there is withering denunciation springing from holy indignation. For the addressed there is marked disapproval and an earnest desire to restore. For the One who has called him there is profound reverence and humble gratitude."

As we noted in our **Introduction**, Paul wrote **Galatians** to counter the erroneous, legalistic teaching of the **Judaizers** which was undermining the central New Testament doctrine of justification by faith alone. The pernicious, legalistic teaching of the **Judaizers** is still prevalent in the church today in spite of the clear teaching of the Word of God. Persons are taught to believe that they must **do** something in order to be saved. Christian leaders continue to pervert the Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone by adding religion, good works, so called “holiness standards” church ordinances, and the works of the law. But the Bible says in **Romans 4:4-5**,

4 Now to the one who works, his pay is not credited due to grace but due to obligation.

5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in the one who declares the ungodly righteous, his faith is credited as righteousness.

(New English Translation)

Brothers and sisters, the Christian life does not consist in **behaving** but in **believing** and in **being**. Such a life is one out of which behaviour **naturally** proceeds. It is not something **external**, but **internal**; it is the **root** producing the **fruit**. It is a life that must be free to express itself. Therefore to impose regulations upon the Christian life other than those contained in Scripture is to seriously handicap it. There have always been, and there will always be persons who strongly oppose the idea of God’s salvation being offered freely to those who believe. They reason that such a wonderful gift from such a holy God must require some kind of payment from us. Their view is that while we ought to thank God for His grace, we must also understand that He expects us to somehow merit or earn that grace. In other words, there must be something that we can and must do to pay off the debt we owe to God.

This was the view of the **Judaizers**. They taught that salvation was a combination of God’s grace and human effort. Unfortunately, the majority of persons who profess Christianity believe this, even if they are unwilling to admit it. The doctrine of the **Judaizers** was a mixture of

grace and works. They tried to enforce Jewish circumcision upon the Gentile converts to Christianity and were strenuously opposed and criticized for their behaviour by the Apostle Paul, who used many of his epistles to refute their doctrinal errors.

But Paul's letter was not written only to silence the **Judaizers** but also to define, once and for all, what the Gospel and Christianity really are. **Galatians** has been referred to as "God's polemic against legalism of every description." Its great theme is justification by faith alone. The object of the epistle is the defence of the Gospel which Paul had received by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Since the **Judaizers** recognized Paul to be the chief exponent of the Gospel of grace, and the apostle to the Gentiles, they continually sought to undermine his work. One of the methods they employed was that of depreciating his apostolic authority. They argued that Paul was not one of the original Twelve, he had not personally listened to Christ's voice, he had not seen Christ, since he had not attended on Christ's earthly ministry, and he had not been sent out like them at Christ's express command. Furthermore, they said that he had not received the gospel by direct revelation from Christ as had the others, but had learned of it from the Twelve.

Brothers and sisters, this still happens today. When someone wants to subvert a **ministry**, he or she invariably slanders the **minister**, especially if he or she is unable to argue successfully against the doctrine. Paul's enemies were no exception.

Paul was very much aware of the efforts of the **Judaizers** to undermine his ministry among the Galatian believers, and he therefore asserts his apostolic authority as soon as he commences his letter. In verse **1** he writes, "*From Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor by human agency, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead)*" Although he not one of the original twelve apostles, Paul claimed equality with them. He states that he was an authentic, genuine apostle of Jesus Christ and God the Father, and therefore he was

qualified and ready to preach and defend the true Gospel of Grace which was being assaulted by the **Judaizers**. So from **Galatians 1:1** through to **Galatians 2:21**, Paul gives his defense of the Gospel, basing his defense on his divinely bestowed authority and not on his personal opinion.

Paul refers to himself as “*an apostle*.” By the addition of the title “apostle” to his name, Paul claims, at the very beginning of his letter, to be one who is divinely commissioned to preach the gospel and authorized to propagate Christianity. He conceived of his apostleship as related to the world wide Church, and he thought of Christianity as an organic whole, not simply as isolated centers of effort and of divine appointment in relation to it.

The word “*apostle*” is a translation of the Greek word **apostolos**: (**ap-os’-tol-os**), which is made up of **apo** “from” and **stello** “to send,” thus referring to the act of sending someone on a commission to represent the sender. It was used of a delegate or messenger, one sent forth with orders. Our word ambassador would be a good translation. The word, as Paul uses it here, does not merely refer to one who has a message to announce, but to an appointed representative with an official status who is provided with the credentials of his office. With the coming of Christ, the word **apostolos** was applied to those commissioned by Christ as bearers of the gospel with His full authority. According to **Expositor’s Bible Commentary** it is in this sense that the word is used in all seventy-nine instances of the term in the New Testament.

John MacArthur in his commentary on **Galatians** states that an apostle, “was an envoy, ambassador, or messenger who was chosen and trained by Jesus Christ as His special emissary for proclaiming His truth during the formative years of the church. In its primary and technical usage, the term applied to the original twelve who were chosen at the beginning of Jesus’ earthly ministry (**Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13**) and were set aside to lay the foundation of the early church and to be the channels of God’s completed revelation (**Acts 2:42; Ephesians 2:20**). They were also given power to perform

healings and to cast out demons as verifying signs of their divine authority (**Acts 2:43; 2 Corinthians 12:12; Hebrews 2:3-4**). It should be noted that, shortly before Pentecost, Judas was replaced by Matthias (**Acts 1:26**)."

Paul informs us that his apostleship was "*not from men, nor by human agency.*" The Greek word translated "*not*" signifies absolute negation with no exceptions. No human being appointed Paul an apostle. Paul was not appointed an apostle by a group of men such as the leaders of the early church in Jerusalem or the leaders of the church at Antioch.

He says, "*not from men.*" The Greek New Testament scholar **Kenneth Wuest** explains that Paul is very careful in the use of his prepositions in this verse. The word "*from*" is a translation of the Greek word **apo**, which speaks of ultimate source. Paul is saying unequivocally that his apostleship did **not** come from men as its ultimate source. By the use of this preposition, he distinguishes himself from the false apostles who derived their commissions from men and not from God. Paul denies that his apostleship had a human source. The source of his apostleship was not human but divine in character.

Not only does Paul say that his apostleship did not find its **ultimate** source in man, but he says it did not find its **intermediate** source in man. Human beings were not even the agents of God in conferring that apostleship. Paul is very clear about this. He says, "*nor by human agency.*" Thus Paul not only denies that he was made an apostle by men, but he also denies that God used the intermediate agency of man to constitute him as an apostle. His apostleship was not derived from a human source or given through a human channel. In short, in the strongest way possible Paul denies any human involvement in his appointment as an apostle.

Commenting on this verse, **J Vernon McGee** made the following remarks: "I am an ordained minister from men and through men. I was told that I had to finish seminary and obtain certain degrees before I

could be ordained. I did that. That was from men. That was the legalistic side. Next I went before a church body that examined me. Their decision was that I should be an ordained minister. In the Second Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, I knelt, and a group of men put their hands on me and said, 'You are now an ordained minister.' That is the kind of minister I am. Paul said, 'I am not that kind of an apostle. Men had nothing to do with it. I am an apostle directly by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead.'

Paul was called to be an apostle *“by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.”* Here Paul makes the bold claim that his apostolic call and appointment were heavenly in 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.

Paul is very strong in his language when contrasting the divine origin of his apostleship with the human origin of the apostleship of the false apostles. The word *“by”* is a translation of the Greek word **dia**, which is the preposition denoting intermediate agency. The use of **dia** here indicates that Paul is speaking of the channel through which his apostolic appointment came to him.

The addition of the words God the Father to the name Jesus Christ, shows that Paul is not thinking simply of the agency through which his apostleship came to him, but also of the source. Both names are governed by the one preposition **dia**, indicating that Jesus Christ and God the Father are not separated in Paul’s mind as sustaining different relationships to his apostleship. Taken together, therefore, the whole expression has the meaning, *“directly from Jesus Christ and God the Father.”*

Why does Paul mention that God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead? He does so because without the resurrection, the Gospel is powerless! The resurrection of Christ is also mentioned to prove that the Lord Jesus is alive and that as the Living Lord He called and appointed Paul as His apostle. Finally, the resurrection indicates that Paul was qualified to be an apostle since he had literally seen the Risen Christ (**1 Corinthians 9:1**). By adding this qualifying phrase, Paul also emphasizes the fact that whereas the other apostles were commissioned by the Lord Jesus while He was in His humiliation on earth, he himself was given his commission by the resurrected glorified Christ in heaven.

Paul had received his commission as an apostle directly from the Lord Jesus when he met Him on the Damascus road. In **Acts 26:8-18**, while making his defense before King Agrippa, Paul speaks of his fierce persecution of the church, his dramatic conversion and his apostolic commission:

8 Why do you people think it is unbelievable that God raises the dead?

9 Of course, I myself was convinced that it was necessary to do many things hostile to the name of Jesus the Nazarene.

10 And that is what I did in Jerusalem: Not only did I lock up many of the saints in prisons by the authority I received from the chief priests, but I also cast my vote against them when they were sentenced to death.

11 I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to force them to blaspheme. Because I was so furiously enraged at them, I went to persecute them even in foreign cities.

12 “While doing this very thing, as I was going to Damascus with authority and complete power from the chief priests,

13 about noon along the road, Your Majesty, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, shining everywhere around me and those traveling with me.

14 When we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You are hurting yourself by kicking against the goads.'

15 So I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord replied, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.'

16 But get up and stand on your feet, for I have appeared to you for this reason, to designate you in advance as a servant and witness to the things you have seen and to the things in which I will appear to you.

17 I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles, to whom I am sending you

18 to open their eyes so that they turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a share among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

(New English Translation)

In verse **17** we are informed that Paul was commissioned to be an apostle, particularly to the Gentiles. He was given apostolic authority not only to pioneer the churches in Galatian but to also deal with problems in the churches. Lord willing, in our next Lesson we will begin to see how he dealt with the **Judaizers** and their pernicious false Gospel.