

Study 2: Galatians Chapter 1

Introduction

Paul begins the letter – in fact the first 1/3 of the letter, dealing with the issue of his apostleship. Defending his apostleship puts him into the position of not only being heard on the specifics that he wants to say on the major issue at hand, but on every issue.

If he did not establish his apostleship, then it would leave the Judaisers in the position of authority. They were saying that *Paul wasn't a real apostle – he wasn't one of the 12!* and such would therefore give ascent to the things that they said.

Body of the Study

What are the important things that Paul wants them to know?

Exercise

Why does Paul say – don't believe what the apostles or angels say?

Paul talks about “another gospel” – what does he mean?

How did Paul learn the gospel?

What else was Paul doing? Who might he have conferred with?

A subsequent visit to Jerusalem

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What are some of the practical examples of “another gospel” in the world today?*
- *How can we make sure that we don't pervert the gospel?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapters 1&2 together.

Notes for study 2: Chapter 1

Introduction

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Body of the Study

What are the important things that Paul wants them to know?

The introduction (by Paul) to the letter is found in 1:1-10. The main part of the letter begins in 1:11 “*But I want you to know brethren...*”

As an exercise, highlight the key words in the introduction section, and then look to see if you can find the same key words also in the conclusion of the letter. Draw a line linking the key thoughts / words together.

What does this tell you about the things Paul is going to say in the letter?

Some of the key things that we find are:

Paul was made an apostle by Jesus Christ (1:1), and was persecuted for the gospel – in contrast to Judaisers (6:12). The Judaisers only do what they do to avoid persecution (6:12), but Paul is only motivated by the cross of Christ (6:14). They don't even keep the Law that they are trying to bind on others (6:13). These people in trying to make a good impression outwardly (6:12) are just throwing you into confusion (1:7). I am astonished (1:6) that you have so quickly turned to a different gospel (1:6) and by so doing have deserted the Lord (1:6). You should remember what you were taught (1:8) and don't let anybody else – even an angel from heaven – teach you anything else! (1:8,9).

Why does Paul say – don't believe what the apostles or angels say?

Paul is NOT saying that we should disregard what the apostles or the angels say. What he is saying is that the Galatians have been taught the truth. If any other apostles, or even the angels from heaven come, they will come with exactly the same truth that you have already been taught. And if they come teaching something else, then you can be assured that they are only imposters and not who they are claiming to be. John talks about some people who came claiming to be apostles, but were not (Rev 2:2). Paul also spoke about such men (2 Cor 11:13).

Exercise

GAL 1:1 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:

GAL 1:3 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.

GAL 1:6 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!

GAL 1:10 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.

GAL 1:11 **I want you to know, brothers,** that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. (NIV)

This is the key, that tells us that Paul has ended the introduction, and now begins the main thrust of his arguments.

It is also interesting to look at the closing section, and see if Paul also uses the same descriptions there too:

GAL 6:11 See what large letters I use as I write to you with my own hand!

GAL 6:12 Those who want to make a good impression outwardly are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.¹³ Not even those who are circumcised obey the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your flesh.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation.¹⁶ Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God.

GAL 6:17 Finally, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.

GAL 6:18 *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.*

Paul talks about “another gospel” – what does he mean?

This is one of the key issues in the book – in fact it is essentially the reason that Paul wrote the letter. Paul gets down to *tintacks* very quickly. He does not give the usual warm greetings and commendation. In verse 6 and 7 he hits them with the issue.

The argument that Paul makes (and will elaborate on in chapters 3 and 4) is that *there is only one gospel*. Anything that purports to be the gospel but is different than the apostles teaching *is not the gospel it is a perversion*.

There are no *variations* of the gospel, there are no *alternative* gospels, there are no *other* gospels, and (by implication) there are no *revisions or supplements* to the gospel. And there is no *substitute* for the gospel “...for it is the power of God to salvation to everyone who believes...” (Rom 1:16). Paul says that *no apostle*, and *no angel* from heaven will teach *anything* different than the pure gospel that has already been heard and understood – and if they do, then they are telling lies and we should not believe them.

How did Paul learn the gospel?

This is a perfectly natural question. The Judaisers had come and were apparently saying that Paul was not really an apostle – he wasn’t one of the 12! And they had come from Jerusalem – from the real apostles! They were therefore teaching that what Paul taught was not right, and wasn’t the *real gospel*. Paul sets about countering this argument by establishing his credentials, and the credentials of what he taught (the gospel).

He begins by saying that it was not from man (1:11-12). In fact, no man had anything at all to do with what Paul knew and taught. It would be a natural conclusion that Paul’s gospel must have been learned from others, as he was not one of the 12 who learned it directly from Jesus. But the point that they either forget (or were not aware of) was that Jesus spent three years teaching Paul away from the influence of any man – just as he had spent three years teaching the other apostles.

Paul makes the point that he was intensely involved in the Jewish religion (1:13-14) and in fact he had advanced well beyond those of his peers. He was extremely zealous towards upholding the Law. There could hardly be any others who could claim to have gone to distant cities to seek out the christians, drag them back to Jerusalem (Acts 9:1-2), and who had the authority of the very High Priest to do so (Acts 9:1). He even made them blaspheme, and saw to it that they were put to death (Acts 26:10-11). If *anyone* knew about the Law, it was Paul – who was educated under Gamaliel, one of the greatest teachers of the Law and a member of the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:3).

The point that Paul is making is that the Judaisers who were saying that Paul did not really understand the Law had *nothing* on him!!! But his understanding of not only the Law, but also the gospel was equal to anybody’s – the other apostles not withstanding.

Immediately after his conversion, Paul did not go near the rest of the christian leaders in Jerusalem. He went firstly to Arabia for three years (1:17-18), then came back to Damascus (1:17; Acts 9:23). The many days that Luke refers to in 9:23 is the three years that Paul refers to in 1:18.

When he finally did get to go to Jerusalem (his first trip back since his conversion) he had already spent the three years with the Lord. During this time, Paul did not “*think out his theology*” as many modern writers are quick to accuse him of, but rather it was during this time that he “...*received the gospel – not from man, neither by man – but from the Lord Jesus...*” (1:12)

After returning to Damascus again, (1:17, Acts 9:23) the Jews are seeking to kill Paul, and he escapes through a window in the wall in a basket (Acts 9:25; 2 Cor 11:33). It is only then that he

makes his first trip back to Jerusalem. The disciples were afraid of him (why wouldn't they be), and only accept him because Barnabas vouches for him (Acts 9:26-27). But this trip was very quick – Paul only stayed there 14 days, and he only saw Peter and James the Lord's brother (James the Less) (1:18-19).

The point that Paul is making here is that he ***did not*** get or learn his doctrine from Peter or any of the other apostles, as he was not there long enough to have done so. ***So, where did he learn it from?*** The only credible answer is that he got it by revelation from Jesus whilst he was in Arabia, as he has already asserted in this chapter (1:12, 16, 19).

What else was Paul doing? Who might he have conferred with?

Whilst he was in Jerusalem, Paul was active in preaching the gospel (Acts 9:29) even although it was such a short visit. Paul was thinking that with his background in the Jewish religion, and his credibility, that he would be able to teach the Jews the truth. Whilst he was in the Temple praying, the Lord appeared to him in a trance, and said “...*get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not believe your testimony...*” (Acts 22:17-21). In fact, the Jews were seeking the opportunity to kill him (Acts 9:29), and so the disciples escorted him down to Caesarea, and he went to Tarsus.

Paul describes this as the time that he went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia (1:21). He was not known physically to the churches of Judea, but only by reputation (1:22-23).

The point that Paul is making, is to again show that he did not have the opportunity to learn the gospel from the brethren in Judea – the only place that he could have learned it was by direct revelation from Jesus – the time that he spent in Arabia.

The chapter closes with the thought that the brethren in Judea rejoiced because of Paul. Even though most of them did not personally know him, and even though they had not personally taught him the gospel, yet they were absolutely convinced of his “*status*” in the faith, and that he taught the truth.

The message is one of unity. There was not dispute between Paul and the Jews in Judea by way of doctrine. It is true that there was some disagreements between Paul and Peter – and he is going to deal with that in the next chapter – but that was over Peter's *inconsistency of practice*, ***not*** over any matter of *doctrine*.

A subsequent visit to Jerusalem

Before closing this study, we will note that the next chapter begins with another visit to Jerusalem 14 years later, and took Barnabas and Titus with him. But Paul made another visit to Jerusalem between the two that are recorded here in Galatians.

When the church at Antioch grew, Barnabas is sent to Tarsus to go and find Paul and bring him back to Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). At that time, famine relief was collected by the brethren in Antioch and sent to the brethren in Judea by Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:28-30 (vs 30)). They might have even been in Jerusalem when James the brother of John was killed (Acts 12:1-2), and some time (weeks???) later they returned to Antioch, bringing with them Barnabas' nephew John Mark (Acts 12:25).

It would appear that Paul did not record this visit in the Galatian letter, as he did not meet with or visit any of the apostles – and so it was totally irrelevant to the argument and discussion in the letter.