

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS

TEXT: GALATIANS 1:1-9

Introduction:

1. Paul's epistle to the Galatians was probably written about AD 60, during Paul's third visit to Corinth.
2. Galatia was originally a country in northwest Asia Minor. About three hundred years before Christ, a large number of European Gauls of Celtic (English, Irish, Scotch) stock migrated to what is today called Turkey.
3. The area they settled in eventually became known as "Galatia." It was settled by the Gauls who gave the area the name "Galatia."
4. Later Galatia was taken over by the Romans, who enlarged it and incorporated it into the Roman Empire as a province.
5. J. Vernon McGee said, "Paul visited the Galatian churches on each of his three missionary journeys. There is no mention in the epistle of another visit to the churches. The epistle was evidently Paul's last word to these churches, written after he had visited them on the third missionary journey" (*Thru the Bible*).
6. Paul's epistle to the Galatians played a very influential role during the Protestant Reformation. It was Martin Luther's favorite epistle, and his *Commentary on Galatians* became widely read.
7. Paul asserted his authority as an apostle in the first chapter (1:1). He wanted them to know that he received the true Gospel message directly from the Lord Jesus Christ, and not from men (1:11, 12).
8. Paul was amazed that the Galatians would depart from the true Gospel, and he used strong language to emphasize the danger of the error of mixing law and grace (1:6-9).
9. "Let him be accursed" (1:8, 9) literally means, "Let him spend eternity in hell."
10. *Strong's Concordance* says the word means, "a person doomed to destruction."

I. THE BACKGROUND TO THE EPISTLE

1. After the apostle Paul had left Galatia, false teachers entered the churches and introduced false doctrine. They taught that salvation was by faith in Christ plus keeping the law of Moses. Their message was a mixture of law and grace, of Christianity and Judaism.
2. When Paul heard of this he wrote his epistle to the Galatians. In it he sets forth the true character of salvation as being by grace alone from beginning to end.
3. "The theme of Galatians is the vindication of the Gospel of the grace of God from any admixture of law-conditions, which qualify or destroy its character of pure grace" (Scofield).

II. PAUL'S SALUTATION (1:1-5)

1. When we speak of a salutation, we are referring to the writer's opening words or remarks, which serve as the prefatory greeting in a letter. In modern times, we simply start by saying, "Dear Sir" or "Dear Brethren," etc.
2. But in Bible times, salutations were longer and more interesting. In those days, the author usually identified himself in the salutation. Today, we usually sign off at the conclusion of the letter.
3. This salutation is brief and to the point. In Paul's other epistles, he begins by addressing the recipients of the epistle as beloved saints or some other term of affection. But here it is simply, "unto the churches of Galatia" (1:2).
4. The seriousness of their error caused Paul to be brief and somewhat stern with them (cf. 1:6). There is no words of commendation, praise or thanksgiving. No one is mentioned by name. There is no request for prayer in this epistle.
5. If you compare this letter with Paul's other letters, you will notice that it is decidedly different. Here Paul's greeting is cool, brief, formal, and tense.
6. Paul's call to be an apostle was not from man, but from God (1:1). It did not originate with men, nor was it communicated from God through men. It came directly from God. Because of criticism from the false teachers, Paul starts off his letter by defending his apostleship.
7. Unfortunately, most men (and all women) who call themselves "ministers" are not called by God. Many have placed themselves in the ministry, and God had nothing to do with it.
8. A man who has is called by God alone and who is responsible to God alone has freedom to preach God's message without fear of man.
9. As in all of the epistles, grace always comes before peace (1:3). Grace is God's undeserved kindness toward lost sinners. Instead of commanding wicked men to do something, grace tells them what God has already done.

10. The law condemns sinners but grace invites them to receive salvation as a free gift.
11. "Instead of looking for good men whom it may approve, grace is looking for condemned, guilty, speechless, and helpless men whom it may save, sanctify, and glorify" (Scofield).
12. Whenever we are confronted with the error of legalism, we need to stop and ask, "Why did Christ die?" Paul gives us the answer to this question in verse 4 - Christ "gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father."
13. If the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself to settle the sin question, then it is both unnecessary and impossible for us to add to it.
14. The substitutionary death of Christ is at the heart of the Gospel and forms the basis for this epistle (cf. Gal. 2:20, 21; 3:1, 13; 5:11, 24; 6:14).
15. Christ died to "deliver us from this present evil world" (1:4). This world is "evil" politically, morally, religiously, and in every way you can think of. God does not want us to improve this wicked and corrupt world but to deliver people from it.
16. One preacher put it this way: "God is not interested in improving the world, or making men comfortable in it, but in delivering men from it. Our priorities should coincide with His" (William MacDonald).

III. THE THEME OF THIS EPISTLE (1:6, 7).

1. I already quoted Scofield as to the theme of this epistle. He also says, "The test of the Gospel is grace" (bottom of page 1241).
2. Paul tells these Galatians that he is amazed at their willingness to abandon the true Gospel for "another gospel" (1:6), a mixture of law and grace.
3. According to the Bible, there is "another Jesus," "another spirit," and "another gospel" (II Cor. 11:1-4). This false gospel is preached by "false apostles" (II Cor. 11:13-15).
4. There are also false churches, and according to Revelation 17 and 18, they will soon all be joined together in one big ecumenical super-church.
5. False teachers "trouble" people and "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7). There are a lot of troublesome "gospel-perversers" out stirring up trouble and leading people astray.
6. Churches and religious cults which teach salvation by good works are leading souls to hell. They are preaching "another gospel" and that is why Paul uses such strong language in condemning this error (1:8, 9).
7. There is only one true Gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4). Salvation is by grace through faith (Eph. 2:8, 9).

IV. PAUL'S WARNING

1. We saw Paul's salutation and Paul's theme. Now let us look at his warning (1:8, 9).
2. "Accursed" (1:8, 9) means "damned." The Greek word is *anathema*. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha" (I Cor. 16:22).
3. The law has a curse for those who fail to keep it (cf. Gal. 3:10). And the Gospel has a curse for those who try to pervert it!
4. Notice that Paul refers to "an angel from heaven" (1:8). Interestingly, Mormons claim that an angel from heaven (Moroni) visited Joseph Smith and gave him a new gospel. Paul says they are "accursed."
5. Romanism is another false gospel (good works and sacraments, rosaries, candles, pope, Mother Teresa, visions of Mary, etc.).
6. Seventh Day Adventists teach a false gospel of law and grace. They say Christians have the mark of the beast for worshipping on Sunday.
7. All religious cults (Christian Science, Moonies, J W's) teaching a false gospel of salvation by works.
8. Liberalism preaches a false gospel.
9. The so-called "Social Gospel" is a false Gospel. The man who is credited with starting the social gospel is Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918). He was a liberal Baptist pastor on the West Side of New York City, in the area known as Hell's Kitchen.
10. As a pastor in a poor neighborhood, he encountered many social problems, and he attempted to help alleviate some of these problems by becoming involved in local political and social activities.
11. Later, after post-graduate studies in Germany (in a very liberal school), he became a professor of church history in Rochester Theological Seminary.
12. Rauschenbusch completely adopted the liberal teachings of his professors in Germany, and he added the liberal political ideas being espoused at the time.
13. The social gospel was basically communism disguised as Christianity.
14. Pastor Rauschenbusch has been dead for nearly 100 years but his unscriptural "social gospel" still lives on. He wrote books and articles promoting it, and liberal churches all over the world have adopted it.
15. Rick Warren, the "Purpose Driven" pastor in California is probably the biggest proponent of the social gospel today, though he shuns the term.
16. Scott Bessenecker, the associate director of missions for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, recently said. "InterVarsity is trying to help students embrace and engage the social dimensions of the gospel in a way that will inspire individuals to say, 'I want to follow this Jesus.'"

17. The so-called "full gospel" is another gospel. There is only one true Gospel (I Cor. 15:1-4) and nothing can be added to it to make it more "full."
18. Baptismal regeneration is a false gospel (Lutheranism, Anglicanism, and other off-shoots of popery).
19. All of these false religions and false cults add to the Gospel. The technical name for this is "legalism." That is the theme of this epistle.
20. The word "legalism" has been abused and twisted. Legalism is not teaching holiness or Bible standards or separation from worldliness.
21. Legalism is teaching that salvation is through good works.

CONCLUSION:

1. Harry Ironside told a true story about a young woman who was traveling by train with her little baby. It was during a winter storm with snow falling and sleet covering everything.
2. The train made its way along slowly because of the ice on the tracks and the snow-plow went ahead to clear the way.
3. The woman seemed very nervous. She was to get off at a small station where she was to be met by some friends, and she said to the conductor, "You will be sure and let me know the right station; won't you?" "Certainly," he replied, "just remain here until I tell you the right station."
4. She sat rather nervously, and again spoke to the conductor, "You won't forget me?" "No; just trust me. I will tell you when to get off."
5. A businessman sat across the aisle, and he leaned over and said, "Pardon me, but I see you are rather nervous about getting off at your station. I know this road well and I know when you are supposed to get off. These conductors are very forgetful, they have a great many things to attend to, and he may overlook your request, but I will see that you get off all right. I will help you with your baggage."
6. "Oh, thank you," she said. And she leaned back greatly relieved. In a little while the name of the city the lady mentioned was called, and the businessman leaned over and said, "The next stop will be yours."
7. As the train slowed down, she looked around anxiously for the conductor, but he did not come. "You see," said the businessman, "he has forgotten you. I will help you off," and he helped her with her baggage. The train came to a stop, and since the conductor was nowhere in sight, he opened the door and helped the lady off the train with her baggage and her little baby. In a moment the train moved on again.
8. A few minutes later the conductor came and looking all about, asked the businessman, "What happened to the woman that was sitting here with her

baby?" The businessman said: "You forgot them, but I saw to it that they got off all right at the last station."

9. "What station?" the conductor asked. "The last stop, a few minutes ago," the businessman replied. "But that was not a station! That was an emergency stop! I was looking after that woman. Do you realize that you have put them out in the middle of nowhere in the midst of a snowstorm? There will be no one there to meet them or help them!"
10. There was only one thing to do, and although it was rather dangerous, they had to reverse the engine and back up several miles to try and find the woman and her child.
11. They searched and searched, and finally someone stumbled upon her, and there she was frozen on the ground with her little baby dead in her arms. She was the victim of the wrong information.
12. Ironside concluded this sad story by saying: "If it is such a serious thing to give people wrong information in regard to temporal things, what about the man who misleads men and women in regard to the great question of the salvation of their immortal souls? If men believe a false gospel, if they put their trust in something that is contrary to the Word of God, their loss will be not for time only but for eternity. And that is why the apostle Paul, speaking by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, uses such strong language in regard to the wickedness, the awfulness of misleading souls as to eternal things" (*Galatians*).