

Galatians

Chapter 1

A look at Paul's Letter to the church at Galatia

Chapter 1

Opening (1:1-9)

Greeting (1:1-5)

Notice how Paul begins this passage. He identifies himself not only as an apostle, but he describes to the church at Galatia what defines him as an apostle. He tries very hard to ensure that they church understands that he is not doing this of his own accord, or according to something done in him by himself. Rather, he clearly defines his role as an apostle as a calling from Jesus and the Father only. He even goes as far as to remind the church that the Father is the One who raised the Son from the dead. Paul is doing his best to ensure the church that this is a calling and that it is nothing he has imposed on himself.

Think about who Paul was before the road to Damascus. He was a horrible person who was dragging Christians off to prison and worse. I think, if I were the person receiving this letter, I would have a momentary question about Paul's motive for writing them in the first place. Is this a trap?

He goes on to open the letter offering them grace and peace. This is a hallmark of so many of Paul's epistles. Again, it is not his peace that he offers, but that which comes from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He even goes on to describe to them the purpose of the sacrifice that Jesus made. Look closely to how he describes the gift offered to them. He gave himself for our sins. He did this to deliver us from this present evil age. And He did it according to God's will and for God's glory.

I cannot imagine being the church at Galatians and receiving this letter. This would be a tremendously uplifting greeting. Regardless of what is to follow in the letter, as the reader, I have confidence that Jesus loves me and because He loves me, I am saved by His Father! What an exceptional truth!

Initial rebuke (1:6-9)

Notice how quickly Paul switches from a message of grace and peace. He begins verse 6 saying that he is astonished that they have so quickly turned to another message. To me, the word astonished tells me just how important the message and the grace he has received is to Paul. According to one commentary, the letter of Galatians was written in approximately 48 A.D. In less than 50 years after Jesus paid the price for their sin, the people of Galatia had turned from him. And this did not make Paul happy. Paul was angry because they had turned from the one true gospel. I think these first few verses are an example of Paul living the phrase "love the sinner, hate the sin".

Paul, in these verses, is clearly more interested in the gospel and making sure that they follow what was previously preached to them. The way Paul addresses the Galatians in these verses is instructive. Look at how the people were led astray. They fell for a variant of the truth. We must be very careful when listening to the teaching of others. Teachers should not be taken at face value until their message and interpretation of God's word can be confirmed. We need to carefully listen to those who teach us and compare what they teach to God's word. We will always gain new understanding from God's word. It is our responsibility to make sure that what we have heard is God's truth, NOT the opinion of man.

For teachers who lead students astray, Paul was very clear that judgment would come upon any person who distorts the Word of God. Whether man, or even an angel, anyone who distorts Gods word will be accursed. That is a bold statement and a huge price. It tells me that we must be careful with God's

word. We must read it thoroughly and ask Him for understanding. This one fact is so important to Paul that he emphasizes it a second time!

One way that Satan gets to us is through false teachers. Satan is very slick. His messages sound good. But at the core of his message is misinformation and misrepresentation. Do not forget how Satan tempted Jesus in Matthew 4:1-11. He tempted Jesus by taking His Father's own words out of context and distorting them. Jesus was prepared for Satan's trickery. We must also be prepared and armed with the truth of God's word so that we are not the ones being led astray.

At the end of his opening remarks, Paul reminds them that he is a servant of Jesus. He is not writing these things or preaching these messages to gain the favor of man. Quite the contrary. It would be easy for Paul to please man. However, Paul took the more difficult road, the road that was far more rewarding. He chose to please God in all that he said and did.

Indirect Appeal: Paul's Career with the Gospel (1:10-2:21)

Paul's defense of himself and the gospel (1:10-24)

Paul, who had been a member of the group of legalists who were persecuting the Christians, takes the opportunity to clarify the source of his message. He draws an immediate distinction to the message of his former life. His message is not one of man or of his former life. He is not preaching a manmade or man-influenced message. He lets the church at Galatia know that the message he is preaching, was received by him through revelation by Jesus. His message is clearly defined as God's message, not the message of man.

In Paul's previous life, he acknowledges that he persecuted God's message and His church violently. The word "violently" in the ESV speaks volumes about how passionate he was about shutting down the Christian church. He was a rising star, advanced beyond his years in "the traditions of my fathers". He is admitting that he was wrong to have persecuted the church based on a man-made message. He was more concerned about tradition than he was about the true message of the Bible.

Paul took his calling by Jesus seriously. He understands that God set him apart for ministry and that his calling was evidence of God's grace. After he was called by Jesus, he went away for three years. Presumably this time was spent getting to know the God of the Bible and the message that he had been called to deliver. Only after he spent these three years removed from his previous situation, did he return to Jerusalem. It is instructive to me that Paul took this time out of the public view. Like Paul, we need to take time to really get to know Jesus. The time that Paul took to get to know Jesus gave him the foundation upon which a ministry could be built.

In all those initial years, people only heard of Paul's conversion and his message. Because of his past, it was necessary for him to remain out of the public eye. When God was ready to use Paul, He eased him back into the public forum. God will use us for His good just like He did Paul. Regardless of our past, we can have an active and vibrant ministry, but only in God's time. Sometimes, because of the past, there needs to be healing before a ministry will be productive for God. No matter how bad we think our past is, God can forgive us and use us. That is one of His messages in the life of Paul. God ultimately used a person who persecuted the church to help build it up. Regardless of my past, He can also use me for His good. We must never forget the example of Paul's life. Every time Satan tries to tear us down because of previous failings, we need to be reminded of how God used Paul.

Study Questions – Chapter 1

1. How does Paul open his letter to the Galatians? Why is it important that he opens the letter this way?
2. What does he offer the church at Galatia? What can we learn about how he opened the letter and why that is important to us today?
3. What are the three things that are offered to us by Jesus and the Father? How does this give you comfort or peace today?
4. How does Paul describe the message that he is preaching? How is this message different than his “message” before his conversion on the road to Damascus?
5. How did God prepare Paul for the ministry that he would ultimately have with His church?
6. How did God prepare the church to receive the ministry that God had placed before Paul?
7. How is God preparing you for ministry today, or even in the future?

Application

How has this chapter impacted your life? What changes do you need to make to live more like Paul?
How has God convicted you?