

Galatians 1 pt. 1 v.1-9

V.1-2 Paul's introductory statement to the churches in the region of Galatia

Probable year of founding the churches in Galatia - ~AD 45-48

Probable year of authorship ~AD 57-58 at the end of Paul's third missionary journey, although there is another theory that supposes that Paul wrote this letter much earlier and places it among his first epistles, around 10 years earlier.

Galatia is not a city but a region in the area of modern day Turkey. Cities of Galatia include: Iconium, Lystra, Derbe.

"...seem to have been composed mainly of converts from heathenism...but partly also of Jewish converts, who probably, under the influence of Judaizing teachers, sought to incorporate the rites of Judaism with Christianity...This epistle was written for the purpose of counteracting this Judaizing tendency, and of recalling the Galatians to the simplicity of the gospel...The great question discussed is, Was the Jewish law binding on Christians?" (Easton's Bible Dictionary)

Halley's writes, timely enough, "...there was a general epidemic of circumcision among these gentile Christians..."

This area was controlled by the Roman Empire, one of the main forms of worship, along with paganism, would have been the Imperial Cult - or Emperor worship.

This is the context that Paul enters into as he preached the gospel throughout this region and the Holy Spirit moved among people and the church began to form in this area.

Paul finds himself in a position not unfamiliar to him as he is again compelled to write a letter correcting errors that began to grow within the Galatian church/churches.

We find ourselves the beneficiaries of all of this in our day. We have such sound doctrine to reflect upon when we are faced with questions about conduct and what right doctrine is. We have the certain word of God that was born out of much care, and surely much contention, as we have seen in the Corinthian letters and will see in Galatians.

He introduces himself as an Apostle with a bold statement on who it is that makes Apostles, and by implication he makes known his own thoughts about the notion of man-made Apostles.

Paul says that his apostleship is through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

Note that the foundational truth of our faith establishes Paul's apostleship. His authority and role among the churches is divinely initiated, and established by the Lord Jesus Christ - the redeemer of mankind, and the Father who demonstrates his authority over all things by the resurrection!

Paul's commission is wrapped up in the truth of the resurrection. After all, it was that truth, seeing the risen Lord, that changed his entire life.

Again, we are reminded that no endorsing agency, ordaining body, congregation, or educational institution makes servants in the kingdom of God. Only God does that and He purposefully does so on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the gospel, and the resurrection.

Incidentally for those false ministers who do not believe the resurrection as a historical event, or who try to downplay its centrality, or paint it as allegory - Paul might have something to say about that given that his entire apostleship is tied up in the resurrection.

Paul also commends his “brothers” in the ministry to the churches as well - teamwork makes the dreamwork.

God didn't only call only Paul - there were and are other faithful workers in the kingdom, names of men we may never know until eternity. They are not unnoticed by God and their care for the churches is not unnoticed.

V.3-5 What is it that Paul opens his letter with? It is a common theme in Paul's letters and I pray is the heartbeat of our ministry - GRACE and PEACE. Not Legalism and drama. Or, guilt and anxiety.

Grace is that unmerited, unearned, un-earnable favor of God. The fact that God cares for, loves us completely without our having earned any bit of that favor.

That is how Paul opens this letter. That will be the heart of this letter, and the heart of his ministry really. It is grace alone by which we are saved.

This is something that the Galatians, as we will see, came to forget. They were attempting to improve upon God's grace because of bad counsel from supposedly religious men who were ostensibly

Christians but still preached that Jewish traditions and laws were mandatory to fulfill righteousness.

Juxtaposed against the law this idea of grace is mind-blowing! To explain to somebody - pagans, that Paul was dealing with, that God WANTS us to be in His kingdom, that He loves us no matter what terrible heinous things, or little white lies have stained our past.

And He loves us so much that He gave His son to die and suffer for all of those things in our place that we might be reconciled to him - why?!

That is the confounding question - because He loves us! Why?!

Because we are His creation, bearing His image and He desires for us to bear His righteousness too!

The legalist might respond - You mean I don't have to do anything!? Correct. What if I've already been doing all the things?! That's not necessary. Head-explosion emoji. You have been saved by grace, before you did anything at all!

Paul begins this letter with grace and peace and the good message of reconciliation with God - Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of

God. He is our rescuer, and does not desire to see us languish or waste away in evil and darkness.

V.6-7 The reason for this letter

These dearly loved Christians who found new life in Jesus Christ were turning away from, abandoning, what they knew in favor of something else, a so-called “different good message.”

It sounds like the gospel, there’s just something A LITTLE different about it.

This is where we begin to discuss the concept of heresies.

A heresy is considered an aberrant, unorthodox, unaccepted belief that is opposed to Biblical truth that holds with it certain dangers.

Orthodox belief or teaching mean right or accepted teaching. Not to be confused with the “Orthodox” church which is short form for Eastern Orthodox. We must make the distinction between Orthodox as a proper noun and Orthodox the adjective.

Orthodox belief is right belief. Heretical or aberrant beliefs are skewed, twisted or perverted truths that are biblically inaccurate and generally denounced by “orthodox” Christians.

BTW - we have had over 2000 years to work this stuff out.

“Heresy eventually came to mean a belief deviating from established doctrine in major areas like the Trinity, Christology, and soteriology. Those who embrace error in such cardinal doctrines are known as heretics” *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*.

αἵρεσις - originally “choice,” or “opinion.”

The tricky thing with heresies is that they sound almost right...like yeah, maybe that thing could be true.

And here’s what it may have sounded like for the Galatian Christians.

Some well read, intelligent sounding teacher comes along, finds some Christians who believe in Jesus and are worshipping together. They have a couple of conversations about what it is that they believe and before long this phrase pops up, “...well actually there’s a better way, there’s more to the story that you don’t know, as a matter of fact I can teach you if you’d like...” and they begin to craft the way to God which

is generally through them or through some form of ceremony or religious/legalistic obligation.

The gospel teaches us that Jesus Christ removed all barriers to God for us. These heretical teachers, Judaizers, bringing these Galatians into bondage were putting up barriers for God's precious saints that were redeemed by Christ's blood.

The Bible teaches us in 1 Tim 2:5 that there is only one mediator between the believer, and God (no earthly priests, no laundry list of tasks, no perfect haircut or outfit) - that Jesus Christ mediates for us solely and directly.

Now that doesn't mean that there is no place for the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. As a matter of fact we find in Ephesians 4:11-12 that Christ set those types of workers among the church in order to build us up, but not to get in the way!

And, those men are specifically instructed to: [Tit 2:1 NKJV] ...speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine...

AND

[1Ti 6:3-4 NKJV] 3 If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, [even] the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which accords with godliness, 4 he is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions,...

Unfortunately, there were opportunists among the Galatians wrongly seeking to improve upon the faith of these Christians and there are opportunists, hacks, and posers who go about doing the same today.

They may say, “Oh, you heard that all you had to do to be reconciled to God is believe because by grace you have been saved through faith and not of works? Yeah, yeah, yeah that’s a quaint sentiment but you want to know how to really please God...here I’ll show you for a fee...”

Beware, it’s easy to spot those frauds when the fee is monetary - and hard to discern when the fee you pay is part of your freedom in Christ, part of your faith, when we trade truth for a lie. Those are the invisible things that mean so much more than money that people give up to a “different” or “better” gospel.

The trap is that when we start down that path to please God any other way than by being totally dependent on the righteousness of Christ

that we are robed in, that was purchased by Him at the cross, we will never find the end.

We will always come up short, we will fail, and then we will enter into an endless cycle of guilt, shame, hypocrisy and falsehood because we will try our best to please God through our charade as if He doesn't see the reality of our hearts.

Then we will just keep living in that charade for others because we are afraid to show any realness or vulnerability, or we are afraid of "what people will say," and before we knew it we have abandoned the faith altogether in favor of a works based righteousness that is doomed to failure.

The beauty of clinging to the righteousness of Christ is that it is the ultimate salve for guilt. When the whisper in your mind begins to repeat over and over again, "you're not good enough, look how weak you are," we can respond in faith, "That's true, but Christ is holy and good and has redeemed me by His blood. I am His and He has promised to make me like Him."

The miracles this does for our earthly relationships cannot be overstated. It brings a measure of authenticity and vulnerability that is

quite foreign to most of us who live guarded lives. But when we let go of the mask and reflect Christ - there is freedom in that.

V.8-9 No other gospel

Part of remaining vigilant is understanding that WE are susceptible to deception, to deceiving others, and deceiving ourselves.

Paul says, "If WE ever preach to you a different gospel - don't listen!"

Paul doesn't place himself above or outside of the realm of the legalist. He has lived his whole life as a Pharisee! The ultimate legalist. He knows his own heart!

He goes on to say that if anybody ever comes and says that an angel from heaven revealed this different better way - they are accursed! We certainly wouldn't take spiritual counsel from those who are accursed or condemned - who are not in fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

I don't think it's surprising that men would attempt this thing either, saying that an angel had delivered to them special information.

This was certainly going on in the early church as it does today, people become infatuated with angels, the supernatural, and that sort of thing. Paul writes on this in Colossians 2.

[Col 2:18 NKJV] 18 Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in [false] humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind...

That is what happened with Joseph Smith and the Mormon church, that is what happened with Muhammad and the religion of Islam.

In both cases these men claimed to have received special information and revelation from an angelic being.

We see now that Paul's words are prophetic in nature! He wrote these words 600 years before Islam, and 1800 years before Mormonism.

God has warned us that if any man or even an angel comes and preaches a different gospel then they are accursed. It is quite clear. So clear, and so important that Paul writes this warning twice.

God must have been trying to tell us something! And I am thankful that He has preserved His word for us that we might be warned - otherwise

we might swoon over the person who comes to us with tales of angels and special information. It is not so.

The gospel of Jesus Christ stands forever and the truth of the gospel is plain and open for all - Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (v.3-5)