

GALATIANS: CHARTER OF CHRISTIAN LIBERTY (study 2)

APOSTLESHIP ASSAILED

Apostasy, Anathema, Authority Asserted

But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed. [anathema, Gk.]

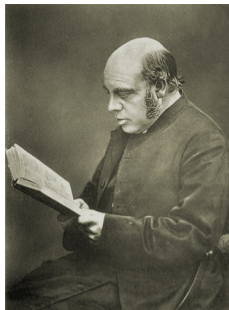
GALATIANS 1:8,9 (NASB)

Paul's wilderness training for his mission task

For if we suppose that the Apostle at this critical moment betook himself to the Sinaitic peninsula, the scene of the giving of the law, then his visit to Arabia becomes full of meaning. He was attracted thither by a spirit akin to that which formerly had driven Elijah to the same region. Standing on the threshold of the new covenant, he was anxious to look upon the birthplace of the old: that dwelling for a while in seclusion in the presence of 'the mount that burned with fire,' he might ponder over the transient glories of the 'ministration of death,' and apprehend its real purpose in relation to the more glorious covenant which was now to supplant it. Here, surrounded by the children of the desert, the descendants of Hagar the bondwoman, he read the true meaning and power of the law. In the rugged and barren region, whence it issued, he saw a fit type of that bleak desolation which it created and was intended to create in the soul of man.



In the midst of such scenes and associations, his spirit was attuned to harmony with his divine mission, and fitted to receive fresh 'visions and revelations of the Lord.' Thus in the wilderness of Sinai, as on the Mount of the transfiguration, the three dispensations met in one. Here Moses had received the tables of the law amid fire and tempest and thick darkness. Here again Elijah, the typical prophet, listened to the voice of God, and sped forth refreshed on his mission of righteousness. And here lastly, in the fulness of time, St Paul, the greatest preacher of Him of whom both the law and the prophets spoke, was



strengthened and sanctified for his great work, was taught the breadth as well as the depth of the riches of God's wisdom, and transformed from the champion of a bigoted and narrow tradition into the large-hearted Apostle to the Gentiles. [Lightfoot 88]

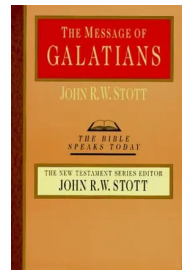
THE UNCHANGING GOSPEL (1:6-12)

1:6-9 Note that even an apostle's authority does not extend to what? (1 Cor.15:1-3)

[v7] The Greek verb for 'trouble' (tarasso) means to 'shake' or 'agitate'. The Galatians congregations had been thrown by the false teachers into a state of turmoil -- intellectual confusion on the one hand and warring factions on the other. It is rather interesting that the Council at Jerusalem, which probably met just after Paul had written this Epistle, were to use the same verb in their letter to the churches: 'We have heard that some persons from us have *troubled* you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions' (Acts 15:24). [Stott 23]

[vv.6,7] Paul says the Galatians have accepted a "different" gospel (vv.6,7), which is really no gospel at all. The thing that was masking the deceit of the false teachers was that their gospel *sounded* like the same gospel -- it had Christ dying and rising again. All they did was add works at the beginning (circumcision) and works at the end (keeping their rules) without changing the middle; and that was the subtlety of Satan. Any other gospel is no gospel at all, but a perversion of the truth. [MacArthur 16]

[v7] In Is. 40-66 is Yahweh himself who is ultimately proclaimed in the good news:



Paul independent of Jerusalem 'governing body'

In emphasizing his independence of the Jerusalem leaders, Paul has regard to the demands of his present *apologia*. As appears in 2:2, he was well aware of the importance of maintaining fellowship with those leaders if his own apostolic ministry was to be effective. Elsewhere he insists that his gospel was based on the same saving events as theirs, since the risen Lord who appeared to him had already appeared to them: 'whether therefore it was I or they, so we preach, and so you believed' (1 Cor. 15:11). But here he is rebutting the account which had evidently won wide circulation, that the Jerusalem leaders instructed him soon after his conversion in the principles of the gospel (including, it may have been said, the continuing requirement of circumcision), but that he broke loose from their tutelage and pursued a line of his own with his circumcision-free gospel -- a line which lacked any recognizable authority. Paul has already denied this account of the matter in v. 12; now he says in effect: 'That is impossible, for I had begun to preach the gospel in response to the Lord's Damascus-road commission before I ever met the leaders of the Jerusalem church; and when at last I did meet them, it was for too short a time for them to impart much in the way of instruction. Many more years elapsed, in fact, before I had an opportunity of setting my law-free gospel before them, and when I did so they acknowledged it to be the valid gospel for the Gentiles, to whom I had been manifestly sent to preach it.' [Bruce 95]

the herald is told to 'say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" ' (Is. 40:9). So in the NT the bearers of the gospel summarize their commission in words such as these: 'what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord' (2 Cor. 4:5). This comes close to the Hellenistic usage of the word-group, which has to do with 'the God-Emperor who is venerated in the cult and the [evangelion] which proclaims him'. [Bruce 81]

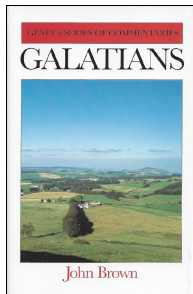
They might have taken refuge in this: no doubt it was what Paul preached, but we have additional truth, beside what Paul gives. [Kelly 25]

1:10-12 Note again that the gospel is REVEALED, not REASONED out! (1 Cor.1:18-25)

[v9] ... the norm, the criterion, by which all systems and opinions are to be tested, is the primitive gospel, the gospel which the apostles preached and which is now recorded in the New Testament. Any system, 'other ... than' (AV), or 'contrary to' (RSV), or 'at variance with' (NEB) this apostolic gospel is to be rejected. [Stott 27]

[v10] Persuading God was a concept entirely foreign to Paul's mind: it was the kind of thing that religious charlatans and practitioners of magic thought they could do. It was common superstition, denounced by Hebrew prophets and by the higher paganism alike, that the deity could be persuaded by gifts ... [Bruce 85]

[vv6-10] They might suppose that they were not materially altering the gospel, -- they were only adding to it the observance of the Mosaic law. But this addition was in reality a most important alteration, -- indeed, a complete perversion. The gospel as taught by Paul was a system of pure grace -- this was converting it into a variety of the laws of works. In Paul's system good works were represented as the necessary fruit of justification; whereas in this system, they, along with faith in the Messiah, were represented as the procuring cause ... Every plan, for example, which, like that of the Judaizing teachers, leads men to depend on their own obedience to any law to any extent, in any degree, either as the ground of their justification or the means of their justification, is another gospel. [Brown 44,45]



PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY (1:13-24)

1:13-19 Paul did NOT receive his commission from the Jerusalem church (cf. Acts 13:1-4)

[v15] It is just conceivable that Paul has at the back of his mind the basic sense of 'Pharisee' (Heb. *parus*, Aram. *peris*, 'separated'): now he is, so to speak, a 'separated person' in quite a different sense from formerly. But such a play on words, even if it was present to Paul's own mind, would not have been appreciated by his readers ... Before ever he was born, Paul means, God had his eye on him and set him apart for his apostolic ministry. [Bruce 92]

[v16] When Paul says "I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood" he is claiming he had all the information he needed. His knowledge and his apostleship came directly from God. He needed no human teachers. In fact, if we look at Acts 9 (a passage that fills in the gaps of this period in Paul's life), we see that Paul preached Christ in the synagogues at Damascus *immediately after his conversion*. And from the start his preaching was so powerful and effective that he confounded

the Jews (see Acts 9:19-22). [MacArthur 23]

It has even been suggested that those 3 years in Arabia were a deliberate compensation for the 3 years of instruction which Jesus gave the other apostles, but which Paul missed. Now he had Jesus to himself, as it were, for 3 years of solitude in the wilderness. [Stott 34]

1:20-24 The Jerusalem and Judean churches only *recognized* Paul's authority. He was *recognized*, not *authorized*, by the Jerusalem apostles (see Ray Franz, *In Search of Christian Freedom*)

[v21] The success of a minister's labours depends, in a great degree, on the confidence which those whom he ministers have in the accuracy of his information and the integrity of his character. Aware of this, no art has been more frequently employed by the enemies of Christianity, whether secret or open, to arrest its progress, than an attempt to blast the reputation of its teachers. In such cases, it becomes an imperious duty, not so much to themselves as to their Master and to his cause, to come forward and defend themselves, to expose the falsehood and malignity of their calumniators, and to turn aside the blows which, though directed immediately at them, are ultimately aimed at Christianity and Christ. [Brown 54]

EVEN THE 'GOVERNING BODY' COULDN'T CHANGE THE TRUE GOSPEL

2:1-5 Did the 'new light' from Jerusalem's apostolic delegates alter Paul's message? (Acts 15:1-2)

[2:2] But his language gives one pause. On the face of it, the meaning seems to be that, in default of a recognition by the Jerusalem leaders that his message was the authentic gospel, his apostolic service would have been, and would continue to be, fruitless. The substance of his gospel, indeed, was not to be changed out of deference to any earthly authority, not even the authority of those who were apostles before him. What Paul was concerned about was not the validity of his gospel (of which he had divine assurance) but its practicability. His commission was not derived from Jerusalem, but it could not be executed effectively except in fellowship with Jerusalem. A cleavage between his Gentile mission and the mother-church would be disastrous: Christ would be divided, and all the energy which Paul had devoted, and hoped to devote, to the evangelizing of the Gentiles world would be frustrated. [Bruce 111]

[2:4] As the gospel of grace liberates (cf. 4:26; 5:1a), so legalism ... enslaves (cf. 4:24f; 5:1b,3). [Bruce 113]

Is Paul saying his authority derives from a "governing body"?

2:6-9 Mark that 'governing body' members James, Peter (Cephas) 'contributed nothing' to Paul's gospel (v.6), only 'recognizing the grace that had been given' Paul by the Lord for his Gentile mission

[2:7] Although Paul added something to their gospel, they could add nothing to his. The apostle announced Christ as the Messiah and made known remission of sins

through His name; but they did not bring out the heavenly glory of Christ as Paul did. He brought out all these truths, and more which they never touched on. That is the reason why he so constantly speaks of “my gospel.” Because while, of course, as to the grand truths of the gospel there could be no difference between what Paul and the other apostles preached, there was a great advance in that which Paul preached beyond them. There was nothing contradictory ... [Kelly 28]

2:10 Notice that the only request of the Jerusalem apostles had nothing to do with Paul’s message, but rather the mutual concern of ALL Christians – the public display of God’s essential attribute, LOVE (1 John 3:16-19)

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