

Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Lesson I - The Uniqueness of the Gospel (Gal. 1:1-9)

From the very beginning of his letter to the churches in Galatia, Paul, by both his words and his tone, indicates he has a serious message to convey. He identifies himself not merely as an apostle, as he does in his letters to Ephesians and the Colossians; but as an **apostle through Jesus Christ and God the father**. Paul has something to say, and he obviously wants the Galatians and us to see that he is speaking with authority.

Paul typically expressed thanksgiving to God for the churches who received his letters (Phil. 1:3-8, Col.1:3-8, I Cor. 1:4-9), but in Galatians, he gets right to the point. He is amazed that the Galatians were deserting God who had called them by the grace of Christ **(1:6)**. Deserting God. That's about as serious as it gets, isn't it? How could such a thing have happened? Paul equates deserting God's message with deserting God Himself **(1:6)**. Some people, we don't know whom at this point in Paul's letter and we will never know their names, were distorting the gospel. If their message had sounded like some kind of gross heresy, surely the Galatians would have rejected it, but the line between heresy and distortion can be thin and is often in the eye of the beholder. To Paul, a distorted gospel, a diluted gospel, an adulterated gospel was no gospel at all **(1:7-9)**. Why? Because the gospel had come from God and it is good news, really good news, as in, the very best news. **What makes us as humans think we can or should improve on God's good news?**

Why was the gospel such good news to the Galatians, and why should we consider it good news today? To understand the gospel, to understand the book of Galatians, and even to understand ourselves, we need to see how mankind across cultures and history, both individually and collectively, has approached and related to God (or gods in the case of those who have never been taught about the One True God). **We need to see, that within human nature, our nature, yours and mine, each of us somehow knows that "there is something not right with me and there's something not right with us," and because of that we take it upon ourselves to "make it right" with God (or the gods). We think we can, and we must. The goal of "making it right" is to win the favor, or at least not earn the disfavor, of God (or the gods); and it would be nice if we could accomplish that collectively but if not, to put it bluntly, it's every man, woman, and child for himself or herself. We need to see that is part of human nature, our nature, and has been ever since a sad incident in the garden of Eden.**

For the Jew in the first century at the time of Paul's letter to the Galatians, "making it right" all too often had come to mean keeping the law of Moses to an ever-increasing standard, to add rules and laws where there were none, and to point fingers and condemn those who could not or would not agree with them on every fine point of the law. Gentiles across geographical locations and cultures and throughout history up to the first century worshipped many gods. For the Galatians, their world was ruled by Romans but it was steeped in Greek culture. Both the Greeks and the Romans had a long list of so-called gods, created in the image and through the imagination of man. These so-called gods were petty, they were ruled by their passions, and they were argumentative, quarrelsome, and even warring, not

only among themselves but toward mankind. Relating to such gods was difficult to say the least, and man's very best efforts to "make it right" with such gods were doomed to failure.

The gospel had brought a completely different message to mankind, one which had never been heard before or since. It was unique in every sense of the word, and in many ways, it is summarized in **Gal. 1:3-4**.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father. The Jews had never viewed God as their father, at least not in the very personal sense embodied in the phrase Abba, Father. The Gentiles would have never viewed any of their so-called gods as their father, nor would they have wanted to be a any part of family gatherings of such beings. The idea that God would seek and desire peace with us and offer it to us through His grace was simply a message that "did not compute" in the first century or even today.

and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our sins. The idea that mankind, you and me, should offer a sacrifice, maybe many sacrifices, to God is not unique. Mankind has always sought to find sacrifices to appease God (or the gods). It's what we do. It's part of our history and our nature. To be told that God and His Son had provided a sacrifice for the sins of mankind was revolutionary and ultimately earth-changing.

so that He might rescue us from this present evil age. As humans, we try to rescue or deliver ourselves, which prompts the question, "If I can rescue myself, is it even a rescue?" We will develop and discuss the concept of what it means to be rescued from this present evil age as we go forward in the class.

according to the will of our God and Father. Grace, peace, rescue or deliverance, and the sacrifice for sins are all the result of God's will and His desire for them, not ours. He wanted peace with us long before we even dreamed it possible, and He seeks to deliver or rescue us even as we often deny that we need deliverance.

Humans seem to just instinctively know that there is something not right about us, and our human nature tells us that it is our job and within our ability to "make it right" with God. It is a dilemma in which humans have found themselves for ages. The gospel gives us the answer to that dilemma. The gospel teaches us, if we will only listen, that God has taken the initiative to "make it right" with us. Our modern culture seems intent on convincing us that there is no God and there's nothing wrong with you, me, or anyone else. The gospel, as taught to the Galatians by Paul, provides a different message. A study of Paul's letter to the Galatians will continue to provide a contrast between God's wisdom and the wisdom of the world.

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