

– if it does not ring true to the gospel already preached, then, Paul says, the church should reject it and the one preaching it.

Strong words. No liberal, Paul.

Paul stood faithfully for the gospel. Paul would not allow any corruption of the truth, nor any modifications or additions to it.

There was no need for the Gentiles to be circumcised, no need to obey Jewish rituals, all that was needed was faith in Jesus Christ himself, who, we read in verse four, part of the introduction, “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our Father...”

Paul is going to unpack this over the next few chapters; talking about justification by faith, and works of the law, and good works; looking at Abraham, at Sarah and Hagar, as important witnesses to the unique role of faith in being justified before God.

Nothing has changed; the gospel that Paul preached is still the only gospel. There are no additions, no sub-clauses, no amendments; nothing we need to add, just the simple belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour and faith in his loving saving work on the cross.

Next week we will see that Paul’s intense desire not to compromise the gospel, leads him in to dispute with Peter and Barnabas, over the issue of table fellowship with Gentiles.



Copyright © Karl R B Jones, 2020
BRFL009.01.01S

Reflections on Galatians

Galatians 1:6-end

“No Other Gospel”

The gospel that Paul preaches is not a man-made gospel, he did not learn it from the other apostles or the Jerusalem church but from the Lord Jesus Christ himself. Paul is frustrated that the Galatian Christians are so quick to turn away from the gospel. There is no other gospel. Paul curses those who preach a gospel contrary to the one he preached.

For the next few weeks we are going to be looking at Paul’s letter to the Galatians.

Galatians was written by Paul to an area in modern day Turkey. It was written in about 47/48 AD, and concerns the issue of Christian freedom in the face of those who were telling Christians that, to be true followers of Christ, they must adopt Jewish legal practices.

In chapter one of Galatians, we learn about Paul’s authority to preach and the source of his gospel message.

We very often skip over the opening of the letters in the New Testament as if they were not really very important, just formalities, or social niceties.

In Galatians, however, as in many of Paul’s letters the opening remarks are really important setting some of the context of what follows.

Paul introduces himself as “an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father.”

The meaning of the word ‘apostle,’ is ‘one who is sent,’ and many in the early church may have been under the misapprehension that Paul had been sent to them by Peter, or by John, or perhaps James, the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

If that were the case then Paul's authority could rightly be supposed to be derived from them, and his doctrine and teaching subject to their approval.

But Paul is saying this is not so; "I am an apostle, I was sent - not by a human being, by Peter, John or James - but by Jesus Christ himself, and God his father."

This is vitally important. Paul is claiming that his authority does not derive from the apostles in Jerusalem, but from God himself.

As such, Paul's teaching is not subject to the scrutiny of the Jerusalem church. Paul speaks not with the authority of men, but with the direct guidance and inspiration of God through the Holy Spirit.

In the passage we just heard being read Paul says, "that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." That is, directly from Jesus himself.

Paul had been a very zealous Jew, who was converted not by apostolic preaching, but by the revelation of Christ to him on the road to Damascus.

Paul points out that when he came to faith, he did not, as some may suppose, go to Jerusalem to be taught by the apostles, but rather went into Arabia and then back to Damascus, having only the words of scripture, and the person of the Holy Spirit as his teacher.

It is not until three years later that he visited Peter and James in Jerusalem.

The issue of authority is key to understanding the early part of this letter. Paul is establishing his authority and his independence of the Jerusalem leaders.

The church in Galatia had been visited by apostles other than Paul, ones who claimed to be sent with the authority of the church in Jerusalem, and who taught that to be fully accepted into the new covenant of faith in Jesus Christ, a person would have to be circumcised and to obey the rules and regulations of the Jewish law.

This was a huge problem for Paul. He was well aware that the law had been, and indeed still was, a great burden upon the Jewish people, and the last thing he wanted was for the Gentiles to be weighed down by laws and religious obligations which were foreign to them, and which even the Jews had difficulty obeying.

Furthermore, Paul was adamant that faith in Christ was alone sufficient to be justified before God, without the need of any additional observations.

For Paul, if circumcision was needed, if any legal obligations were needed, any at all, then the cross was emptied of its meaning, and Jesus' work was to no avail.

Indeed, Paul says, he is astonished that the Galatians are being led astray by this false teaching; later he refers to them as "foolish Galatians," as a people 'bewitched' into denying the truth of the gospel. He warns that the "other gospel" to which they are turning is really no gospel at all.

Paul makes no compromise. There is no middle ground given. Paul never concedes a middle ground when it comes to the gospel. There is one and only one gospel.

This is why the issue of authority, and where Paul's authority comes from, is so important in this letter. He goes on to say "if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you another gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed."

There is no other gospel; if, Paul appeared to be preaching another kind of gospel, or Peter, or John or James, or even an angel from heaven