

Date: 5 Feb 2023

Scripture Passage: Galatians 1:1-5

Title: Introduction to the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians

Introduction

- This epistle to the Galatians was written by Paul. It is of great importance to us, and throughout the history of the church. It has been described as “spiritual dynamite” because of the powerful message that it contains. It has affected some important lives in history. One such man is Martin Luther. Martin Luther was aroused to his need for salvation when studying and expounding the book of Galatians.
- It has been called the “rough draft of Romans” as there is overlap between the book of Galatians and Romans. Both expound on the gospel. But there is also difference between the two books apart from length. Galatians was written in response to perversion of the gospel, while Romans was deliberately written to help the Christians in Rome. One was written during battle/perversion, the other was to build up the faith of Christians.
- This message is about the necessity of having a clear grasp of the gospel in the face of perversions to it.

I. Paul was an apostle of the gospel (1-3)

- Who is the author? Galatians was written by Paul. The same as Saul of Tarsus, persecutor of the church. He was trained under the renowned pharisee Gamaliel. He was a rising star among the ultra-orthodox Pharisees. He was a man full of zeal for his Judaic religion. Paul was converted upon being confronted by risen Christ (Acts 9:3-4). He was so deeply convicted (Rom. 7:7; 1 Tim. 1:15), that he gave himself to preaching & defending gospel. Paul wrote this epistle in the spirit of righteous indignation. He was uncompromising, never ever willing to negotiate the gospel of Jesus Christ. As we explore the contents of this book, we will see why he was so indignant of the issues faced in Asia minor.
- Galatians was written by an apostle of the triune God. Paul identifies himself as an apostle in v1. An apostle can be translated as a sent messenger, or one who is sent forth by the Lord Jesus Christ to be His messenger. One that is sent with authority. Jesus had more than 70 disciples, but only 12 were conferred the authority of apostleship. Jesus Christ from all eternity was ordained by the father, and was sent into this world by the Father’s authority, to fulfill a mission. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit (the third person). He took upon himself human nature, to fulfill the task that the father had given to Him. As Jesus Christ said, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth”. This is what an apostle is. To speak in the name of the supreme authority. Jesus Christ carried the supreme authority with him in speaking. The supreme authority that the Father had given to the Son, was then transferred to a small group of men. Who spoke with the authority of Christ, and with the authority of God the Father. If you reject Paul or Peter, you are rejecting the authority of Jesus. And in turn you reject the authority of the Father. So when Paul identifies himself with his official title, he is claiming divine authority.

Paul is declaring from the beginning that he is an apostle of the trinitarian God. Paul was not an apostle of Judaic god, but of the triune God. One god but three persons. The Holy Spirit was the agent used by the Father to raise Jesus Christ from the dead (Rom 8:11). The Jews who hold to the Old Testament fail to understand the essence of godhead, the way of salvation, and election.

What are the criteria to be an apostle? 1. Disciple of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:21-22a) 2. Eyewitness of resurrected Lord (Acts 1:22b) 3. Called directly by Jesus Christ himself and therefore able to perform signs, wonders and miracles (Acts 2:43). Paul was an apostle in a formal sense. He has been with the Lord, seen resurrected Lord, performed signs & wonders (Acts 1:21-22; 9:3-4; Gal. 1:12, 17; 2 Cor. 12:12). Paul is saying that he is a formal apostle where he is an official apostle of the Lord Jesus

Christ, just like the other 12 disciples of Christ. Although Paul was appointed after Christ had died, the Lord had revealed himself in special occasions to Paul that made him an official apostle. That is why he could say in 1 Cor 11:23-24 “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you”. That is why the prophets and apostles were able to say “Thus says the Lord”. The church is built upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles. The Nicene creed states that “we believe in one holy, catholic/universal, and apostolic church”.

- Written to churches in Galatia during Paul’s first missionary journey. Paul planted churches in Derby, Lystra, Iconium which are in the southern part of Galatia, in today’s Turkey (Acts 14:19-21). It was written after the Council of Jerusalem, AD 49 (Acts 15). There were false teachers perverting the message of Paul saying that faith in Jesus Christ is not sufficient. You need faith and works. The Judaizing heresy argued that those who want to be a Christian regardless of whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, you need to practice the ceremonies of the OT law. Which will by implication deny the shadows of the ceremonies were perfectly and absolutely fulfilled by the finished work of Jesus Christ. To argue for the continuity of those things and shadows, is by implication to empty the fulfilling of them by Jesus Christ. Those who were denying the gospel, were quick to deny the authority of Paul’s apostleship. In arguing against the gospel, they were also arguing against the apostleship of Paul.

II. Paul preached the true gospel (3-5)

- The gospel concerns grace & peace from God the Father.
 - “Grace” is unmerited favor shown by God to undeserving sinners. Grace cannot be earned, it is freely given. Salvation cannot be earned, but it is freely given to undeserving sinners. The gospel is to be proclaimed to everyone. Those who are chosen will turn and respond to the gospel. They might oppose the truth, but they will not be able to resist the work of the Holy Spirit in their life. As they hear the gospel, they may be angry at it, but their conscience will search their hearts. Paul persecuted the church, but in his deep conviction he turned to the Lord. Salvation is by grace.
 - “Peace” is reconciliation with God. We need to be reconciled with God. We need to repent and seek forgiveness from God. We have offended God, we cannot save ourselves, we need His forgiveness. We therefore come to Him seeking forgiveness. Forgiveness is found only in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. We are saved by faith in Christ. And that results in us being reconciled with God. Reconciliation involves our sin being forgiven.

So when Paul speaks of “Grace and Peace” we have to understand it in this sense. 2 Cor. 5:18-20. When we preach and share the gospel, we need people to realize that they have offended the holy God. God’s holy anger is upon them. They therefore need to be reconciled with God. So the gospel is about the necessity in seeking forgiveness and mercy from God. The desire to be reconciled with the God whom they have offended. Are you a true Christian? Have you grasped the concept that you have offended the holy God? Have you sought His forgiveness? The gospel concerns Grace and Peace!

- The gospel concerns the person & work of Christ. “Our Lord Jesus Christ” (3), gave Himself for our sins (4), raised from the dead (1). Paul summarized the gospel as “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:2). He gave himself on the cross. Christ’s death on the cross was not an accident. He laid down his life for his people. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who has come to this world to take on perfect human nature. Without ceasing to be God, he is both God and man in one person. When we proclaim the gospel, we need to proclaim who Jesus Christ is, and why he needs to die. Without Christ’s death on the cross, our sins cannot be forgiven. In the OT, it was shown in the animal sacrifice. That points to Jesus Christ who was the perfect sacrifice, the Lamb of God who came to take the sins of the world.
- The gospel concerns man’s salvation & God’s glory. Deliverance from the present evil age (4). The Greek word for “age” is not a reference to period of time, but an order or system. Here, the age refers to the world that is in sin, a world that is fallen. World that is under the power of Satan. Jesus came to deliver us from this fallen and evil world. When we are saved out of this world, we are transformed into a different person, and taken into a different realm. It is said, we are saved from darkness into God’s kingdom of marvelous light. While we are in sin, our life is under the power of sin. When

Jesus Christ saves us by His grace. He transforms us and puts us under the power of God's kingdom. By the power of His spirit he begins to transform us and make us ready for life in heaven.

Ultimately it is to God's glory. Salvation is therefore to our good and to God's glory. That is why Paul could not help but finish his introduction to this epistle by saying in v5 "to whom be glory forever and ever". That is the effect of the gospel on those who are truly saved. We are so undeserving, if not for God's grace. As the work of grace works in our life, we become humbled and ashamed of who we are. We realize who we are, and we want to give all the glory to our God. We want to point people's attention to Jesus Christ, and we want God to have all the glory. Out of a heart of gratitude to our God, we want to give ourselves to Him. To serve Him. To Worship Him. For that reason, words of praise will come out of us, like the apostle Paul. He wanted to do all things, and all things to God's glory forever and ever.

III. Summary and Application

= Be imitators of Paul (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17), in understanding, faith, zeal for gospel. Paul shows us that he understands the gospel. He has faith. He was a man full of zeal. In what way can we imitate Paul? The mind, heart, and will. Let the mind be clear on what the gospel is. Let our hearts be filled with faith, just as the apostle Paul had faith in what he preached. Let our will be filled with zeal like the apostle Paul. Let us live the life of a servant of Christ. He gave his life to serve the Lord. He knew that he was a sinner saved by grace. Paul said, Christ Jesus came to this world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

= If you realize that you are a debtor to God's mercy, you will show your love to him. Quietly give your life to the Lord. That was what Paul did. Through the history of the church we have seen those who did this. They didn't want to parade themselves, to boast, or to rival anyone. All they want was to give their life to the Lord and to be used by Him. "A debtor to mercy alone, of covenant mercy I sing; Nor fear, with thy righteousness on, My person and offering to bring." Amen, may it be so.