

Studies in Galatians (2/22)

Only One Gospel.*Galatians 1:6-10*

Having in our minds the opening words of the Epistle to the Galatians, we will proceed directly to the subject matter of it. The apostle at once comes to the point, saying:—

"I marvel that ye are so quickly removing from Him that called you in the grace of Christ unto a different Gospel; which is not another Gospel; only there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach unto you any Gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema. As we have said before, so say I now again, If any man preacheth unto you any Gospel other than that which ye received, let him be anathema. For am I now persuading men, or God? or am I seeking to please men? if I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ. For I make known to you, brethren, as touching the Gospel which was preached by me, that it is not after man. For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation of Jesus Christ." "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Gal. 1:6-12.

A careful consideration of exactly what is said in these first verses in Galatians, will save the student much trouble and confusion later on. It is here that we learn the subject of the epistle. We saw last week that the introduction, the salutation, embraced the whole Gospel; surely such an introduction could lead to nothing else but a setting forth of the Gospel. In the verses that constitute this week's lesson, we find this emphasized. Let us study them closely.

Who Calls Men?—"God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." 1 Cor. 1:9. "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus," etc. 1 Peter 5:10. "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." Acts 2:39. Those that are near, and those that are afar off, include all that are in the world; therefore God calls everybody. Not all come, however. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming

of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it." 1 Thess. 5:23, 24. It is God who calls men.

Separating from God.—Since the Galatian brethren were separating from Him that had called them, and as God is the one who graciously calls men, it is evident that they were separating from God. Thus we see that it was no slight thing that called forth this epistle. Paul's brethren were in mortal danger, and he could not spend time on compliments, but must needs get at once to the subject, and present it in as clear and direct terms as possible.

It may be well in passing to note an opinion that sometimes obtains on account of hasty reading, namely, that Paul referred to himself as the one who had called the Galatian brethren, and from whom they were removing. A little thought should convince anybody of the fallacy of this idea. First, consider the positive evidence, a little of which is already noted, that it is God who calls. Remember also that it was Paul himself who said that the apostasy would be the result of men's seeking to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:30), and he as the servant of Christ would be the last man to draw people to himself. It is true that God uses agents, of whom Paul was one, to call men, but it is God, nevertheless, that calls. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself;" we are ambassadors for Christ, so that now it is God beseeching men by us instead of by Christ, to be reconciled to Himself.

It is a small matter to be joined to or separated from men, but a matter of vital importance to be joined to God. Many seem to think that everything depends on being joined to this or that body of religious people; if they are only "members in good standing" in this or that church, they feel secure. But the only thing worth considering is, Am I joined to the Lord, and walking in His truth? If one is joined to the Lord, he will very soon find his place among God's people, for those who are not God's people will not have a zealous, consistent follower of God among them very long. See Isa. 66:5; John 9:22, 33, 34; 15:18-21; 16:1-3; 2 Tim. 3:1-5, 12. When Barnabas went to Antioch, he exhorted the brethren that with purpose of heart they would "cleave unto the Lord." Acts 12:22, 23. That was all that was necessary. If we do that, we shall certainly be with God's own people.

Another Gospel.—The Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Rom. 1:16. God Himself is the power, so that separation from God means separation from the Gospel of Christ, who is the power of God. Nothing can be called a Gospel unless it professes to give salvation. That which professes to offer nothing but death, can not be called a gospel. "Gospel" means "joyful news," "good tidings," and a promise of death does not answer that description. In order for any false doctrine to pass as the Gospel, it must pretend to be the way of life; otherwise it could not deceive men. It is evident, therefore, that the Galatians were being seduced from God, by something that promised them life and salvation. The question consequently would be, "Which is the true Gospel? is it

the one that Paul preached? or the one the other men set forth? Therefore we see that this epistle must be an emphatic presentation of the true Gospel as distinguished from every false gospel.

No Other Gospel.—Just as Jesus Christ is the only power of God, and there is no other name than that of Jesus given among men whereby salvation can be obtained, so there can be only one Gospel. A sham is nothing. A mask is not a man. So this *other gospel*, to which the Galatian brethren were being enticed, was only a perverted gospel, a counterfeit, a sham, and no real gospel at all. Some versions give verses 6 and 7 thus: "I marvel that ye are so soon removed . . . unto another gospel, altho *there is not any other*." Since there is no other gospel now, there never could have been any other, for God changes not. So the Gospel which Paul preached to the Galatians, as well as to the Corinthians,—"Jesus Christ and Him crucified,"—was the Gospel that was preached by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah.

"Accursed."—If any man, or even an angel from heaven, should preach any other gospel than that which Paul preached, he would bring himself under a curse. There are not two standards of right and wrong. That which will bring a curse to-day would have produced the same result five thousand years ago. Thus we find that the way of salvation has been exactly the same in every age. The Gospel was preached to Abraham (Gal. 3:8), and the prophets preached the Gospel (1 Peter 1:11, 12). But if the Gospel preached by them had been different from that preached by Paul, they would have been accursed.

But why should one be accursed for preaching a different gospel?—Because he is the means of fastening others in the curse "Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way." Deut. 26:18. If this be so of the one who causes a physically blind man to stumble, how much more must it apply to one who causes a soul to stumble to its eternal ruin! To delude people with a false hope of salvation,—to cause them to put their trust in that which can by no means deliver them,—what could possibly be more wicked? It is to lead people to build their house over the bottomless pit. Well might the apostle deliberately reiterate his anathema. And here again we see the gravity of the situation that called forth this epistle. The Galatians brethren, having been led astray by accursed teachers, were themselves in danger of damnation.

"An Angel from Heaven."—But is there any danger, any possibility, that an angel from heaven would preach any other than the one, true Gospel?—Most assuredly, altho it would not be an angel recently come from heaven. We read of "the angels that sinned" (2 Peter 2:4), and "kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation" (Jude 6), and that the habitation from which they were cast was heaven. Rev. 12:7-9. Now "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be

transformed as the ministers of righteousness." 2 Cor. 11:14, 15. It is they who come professing to be the spirits of the departed, bringing messages fresh from the realms above (where the departed are not), and preaching invariably "another gospel" than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Beware of them. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." 1 John 4:1. "To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this Word, it is because there is no light in them." Isa. 8:20.

Not Men-Pleasers.—The apostle Paul exhorts servants to be obedient to their "masters according to the flesh; not with eye-service, as men-pleasers; but with singleness of heart, fearing God." Col. 3:22. How much more then should it apply to those who are preaching the Gospel! So Paul declares that he is not seeking to persuade, to conciliate, to gain the favor of, or to please men, but God. The Lord alone is his Master. "We are ambassadors for Christ," and this is true of every Christian to the extent of the ability that God has given him. The position of an ambassador was thus very concisely put by a daily paper, in connection with a circumstance that occurred about two years ago:—

The fundamental basis of the influence and authority of any ambassador is the universal knowledge that he personally is absolutely beyond the reach of praise or blame, of loss or gain, of reward or punishment, in the foreign country where he represents his own. To his sovereign alone, through an official channel, and to no other human being, may a diplomatist look for recompense or fear rebuke.

This is pre-eminently true of Christ's ambassador. To Him, and to *no human being*, are they answerable. To please Him is their sole business. As soon as they seek to please men, they cease to serve Him.

Unbounded Freedom.—"He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman." 1 Cor. 7:22. Paul, "an ambassador in bonds" desired the prayers of his brethren, that utterance might be given him, that he might open his mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel. Eph. 6:19, 20. He who recognizes his relation to Christ as ambassador, is absolutely free. He need fear no man. Nay, it is impossible for him to fear man, since he knows the infinite power that sustains him. He can proclaim the Gospel as boldly before kings as before peasants. How can he fear kings, when he serves the King of kings? And if he does present his message in the presence of God and the angels, how can he fear the face of any man? Such holy boldness is worth untold worlds.

Not of Man.—Paul declared that he did not receive the Gospel from any man, but that it came to him directly from Christ. In the account of his conversion (Acts 9:1-22; 22:10), we see that a man was sent to Paul with a message from the Lord; nevertheless, it is true that Paul did not receive the Gospel from man. If he had, then he would have been a servant of men. But as he was sent, not by any man, but Jesus Christ and God, who raised him from

the dead (Gal. 1:1), so he carried only the message which the Lord Himself gave him. Note how he repeats that what he tells he received of the Lord. 1 Cor. 11:23; 1 Thess. 4:15. "The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord." 1 Cor. 14:37. That was the secret of his boldness. He had no doubts about his message, as he must have had if he had received it from man.

We may have this same confidence, and indeed must have it if we are Christ's servants. If we receive the Gospel from men, then we are not sure of our ground. Not but what God employs human agents, for the Gospel is committed to men, but, no matter whose form we see, no matter what man God uses, we must recognize God's voice, and receive the message fresh from Him, else we have no assurance of its correctness. We need not depend on any man or any church to substantiate the Word of God, or for our knowledge that this or that is or is not His Word. "Ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things." "These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of Him abides in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him." 1 John 2:20, 26, 27. Even tho a man has truth, and if he has received it through some man as the instrument of the Spirit, if he traces his reception of it to that man, or his mind runs to that man and to what he said, as assurance for what he holds, he has not yet the truth as he ought to have it. When a man recognizes the voice of God in a truth that he hears, and receives it as coming directly from the Lord, then it is his own, and he knows it for a certainty. He is then free from men.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ.—Note that it is not simply a revelation *from* Jesus Christ, but the "*revelation of Jesus Christ.*" It was not simply that Christ told Paul something, but that Christ Himself revealed Himself to Paul, and in him; and He is the truth. That this is what is meant here may be seen from verse 16, where we read that God revealed His Son in Paul, that he might preach Him among the heathen. So we read: "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life." 1 John 5:20. The mystery of the Gospel is Christ in the believer, the hope of glory. Col. 1:25-27. Thus it is that every Christian not only may but must be as sure of the Gospel which he believes, and which he makes known to others, as the apostle Paul was. Thank God that He has not left us to follow "cunningly devised fables."

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