1-26-25

Galatians 1:1-5

Paul and his companion Barnabus had evangelized the cities of Galatia during what we call his first missionary journey. The Roman province of Galatia was in what we would now call the middle of Asia minor or Turkey. During their time in Galatia, they won many converts of both Jews and Gentiles; but they also suffered slander, had to flee for their lives more than once, and Paul even suffered a stoning and was left for dead.

Paul’s introduction in this letter to the churches that were in Galatia does not have that warm feeling that his other letters seem to have. He is terse and quick to point out where his authority comes from. As we read the letter we can see why: the Galatians have fallen for a false Gospel and believed reports that Paul himself was leading them astray and had no authority to teach the way he did. After all he had been through to bring the Gospel to these people, it’s no wonder he was upset. But also, Paul loved them and didn’t want them to be led astray.

Now Paul was writing to a particular group of churches, probably house churches, that were in the Galatian region. He uses churches in the plural. It’s important to notice that difference from verses like 13 where he uses the word “church” singular. Here he is referring to the universal Christian church. While there may be many churches, lots of little groups that each comprise the body of Christ, there is only one Christian church; one universal body of Christ that has Jesus as its head and all the individual members make up the body.

The church is pictured in the book of Daniel in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the giant statue made of different metals. In the end it is destroyed by a rock that is not cut by human hands which then grows and fills the earth. That is a picture of the church. Jesus came; He is the rock not of human origin but of divine; and began His church and it continues to expand throughout the world.

The church that is of Christ has some very definite basic beliefs that are not negotiable which include: The only means of salvation is by faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; while works are desirable in the Christian life and are the evidence of our true faith, they do nothing to get us into heaven; Jesus was born of the virgin Mary; He is fully God and fully man; He is not a created being; He was crucified, died, and was buried; He rose from the dead on the third day; and the Bible is the word of God. These are primary doctrines that are not to be trifled with and to disbelieve any of these puts one outside the body of Christ.

People had come to the churches of Galatia and begun teaching that they had to follow all the Mosaic Law in order to be Christian. As Paul says later, this is a different Gospel; in fact, not a Gospel at all. What this does is add works to Jesus in order to obtain salvation; and nothing can be added to Jesus. His work on the cross was perfect and sufficient. If we add to Jesus, we are denying Him; we are denying the perfect salvation offered by God.

And this is the true Gospel that Paul had presented to the Galatians, and the one they had accepted for salvation. Granted they were fairly new Christians and I’m sure the Jews who spoke to them were very persuasive. Still, Paul had presented the means of salvation to them very clearly and they should have been wary of any deviation. We too must be wary. There are very slick people, people who are actually energized demonically, who will offer very subtle changes to the Gospel or what the Bible tells us.

This is another reason we need to know our Bibles and have church fellowship. Jesus warns us not to be deceived. It can cost us blessings, joy in the Lord, and possibly missing salvation. The warning is dire.

These people who followed the apostles around and tried to bring new Christians under the bondage of the Law of Moses were called Judaizers. They were trying to make people become Jews. They were sincere, but they were sincerely wrong; just like the Mormons and the Jehovah’s Witnesses who come knocking on your door.

We can see that one of the tactics they used to convince people of what they were teaching was to attack Paul. If they could make people question Paul’s integrity or authority, then it would be easy to get them to question the message Paul had given. This is a common satanic tactic. If you present a Biblical message, be prepared for someone to try to undermine you. But what you see more often in our day is they will try to undermine the Bible. Again, hold fast to the Bible as the inerrant word of God. It proves itself time and again; and more importantly, once you accept the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith in Jesus, He will give you the ability to recognize its truth.

This letter was written about 49 AD, so there wasn’t much in the way of the New Testament around yet. So the Judaizers attacked Paul’s authority and in that way they could say that his message of the Gospel was incorrect. We see Paul begin his letter with a very strong statement about where his authority comes from: he is an apostle sent through Jesus Christ and God the Father. Human-beings don’t get any more authority than that. And just for good measure Paul throws in the resurrection of Jesus; a basic and unquestionable part of the Gospel.

Let’s look at what an apostle is and why Paul clarified who made him one. The word apostle basically means “sent one”. It is someone who is sent out with a message or a task. A king could send one of his court nobles with a message and that noble would be an apostle. A master could send his servant out with a message and that servant would be an apostle. The messenger would have the authority of whoever sent him; be he king or master or other. And that is why Paul was so clear and definite that he was not sent out by any man. He was sent by God and therefore had His authority.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul lists some gifts that Jesus gave to people specifically for equipping the saints of the church, the body of Christ. One of those gifts was apostleship. Now here’s where we need to be careful. The office of apostle in the New Testament refers to carrying the message of Christ. And it is important to know that the twelve disciples Jesus chose and Paul were unique in history. While I believe that the apostolic gift still exists, it has changed in what all it encompasses. God has not changed, but what the gift of being an apostle involves has. I think that the apostolic gift is what we today would more likely call a missionary.

True missionaries are sent; they have a calling in their lives that comes from God to go into the world and carry the message of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is different from an evangelist, who may travel or stay local and simply tell others of the Gospel. A missionary is sent to another area; another state; another country. Often a place that doesn’t have much access to the Bible or hearing about Jesus.

As I mentioned earlier, the apostles we are familiar with in the New Testament were unique. There have been no others and there won’t be any more. First off, they were distinctly chosen. Luke 6:12-16 tells us that Jesus spent an entire night in prayer. The next morning He called His disciples together. Keep in mind that He had many disciples; many were following Him faithfully. But He specifically chose twelve of them whom He called apostles.

 Now Judas managed to disqualify himself, but he was actually fulfilling the duty that was necessary for him to do. In Acts 1, we read that through correct interpretation of Scripture, prayer, and casting of a lot; Jesus chose Mattias to replace Judas in the office of apostle.

While Paul wasn’t in that group, he was chosen by Jesus. The Bible tells us in Acts chapter 9 about Paul’s Damascus road encounter at which time he was blinded. The Lord spoke to the prophet Ananias and told him to go pray for Paul because: “*he is a chosen instrument of Mine*.” Jesus very straightforwardly chose Paul.

Another qualification for one of these apostles was that they had to be an eyewitness to the physical risen Lord Jesus. This comes from Acts 1:22 where the apostle chosen to replace Judas had to be a witness to the resurrection. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul lists those to whom the resurrected Christ appeared and he ends with verse 18: “*and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also*.” Now this is not referring to a vision or dream or any such thing. The flesh and blood Jesus stood before Paul and spoke with him at least once. In this way, Paul could be a witness to His resurrection.

Notice that there were over 500 people who witnessed the risen Christ, but they were not all apostles because they were not all called.

Those two qualifications to be an apostle as we read in the New Testament, to be specifically called by Jesus and to see the risen Christ, make it that we won’t have any more apostles like Peter, John, Paul and the others who were sent with the authority of God Himself. You might be tempted to think, “Well, it could happen that Jesus would appear to someone for some special reason.” So there’s one more thing: The apostles were able to write Scripture.

The New Testament books were written by apostles or by someone under their direct supervision. Mark was under Peter, Luke was under Paul, and James and Jude were under the apostles in Jerusalem. We do have the book of Hebrews and we don’t know who the human author is, but after centuries of scrutiny it is shown as divinely inspired. There are no mistakes or discrepancies with the rest of Scripture.

The Bible is clear that the cannon of Scripture is closed. There will be no additions or changes made in the future. In will stand as is until Christ returns in glory to fulfill the last jot and tittle.

The warning for us in this day is to know that there are people who claim to be apostles. This is a huge red flag. The first thing to do is see what they mean by being an apostle. If they claim to have the same office as those in the New Testament, get away from them. They are of an antichrist spirit.

I think it’s also important to recognize that the New Testament apostles were human-beings; that is to say, they were not perfect. They made mistakes. In the second chapter of Galatians, Paul speaks of having to call out the apostle Peter because he allowed himself to be influenced by some Jews so that he would not eat with the Gentiles. Paul had a huge argument with his partner Barnabus over John Mark such that they went their separate ways. They were human, they were not divine. But when it came to writing Scripture, what they wrote was perfect, because it was under the divine guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Getting back to Paul telling the Galatian church about his authority. He was an apostle; one sent by God through Jesus Christ. That meant that his presentation of the Gospel carried the authority of God Himself. The Judaizers were in no position to cast suspicion on Paul’s authority or his message.

Paul finishes his terse introduction to the Galatians with a quick overview of the Gospel. He wishes them: “*Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*.” Well, grace is the whole basis of the Gospel. It is only by grace we are saved. We deserve eternal punishment for our rebellion against God and we have no redeeming qualities. Even our good works outside of Christ are as filthy rags in the presence of God and completely unacceptable to Him. So the prayer for them to have grace is a prayer for them to truly turn to Christ alone for salvation, because that is the only way to receive the grace offered.

The Bible is clear that when Christ died for us we were actually enemies of God. There could not be peace between Him and us. In accepting Christ, the enmity is done away with and we are then at peace with God. That’s part of the grace we receive through Jesus.

Paul refers to Him as “*God our Father*”. This is once more part of the prayer that they have accepted the Gospel he presented to them. When we come to Jesus for salvation, He becomes our Lord and Saviour; and then we become the adopted children of God. Only those in Christ can claim God as Father.

And of course the whole point of Jesus coming and dying on the cross was so that He could rescue us from ourselves, because we were part of this present evil age. That is the offer of salvation. And it was done according to the will of God. He wanted to offer us a chance at salvation; He wanted to offer a way for us to be with Him forever.

And thinking of these things, how can you then help but to pray “*to whom be the glory forever*.”

Prayer

Blessed Lord, thank You for Your word. And thank You for the gift of the apostles. You perfectly set up the apostolic system to build up the early church of Jesus Christ; complete with perfect instruction to last us until the return of our King. As Your word tells us, our household of faith is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Jesus Christ as the corner stone.

The prophets foretold Christ, and the apostles taught Him, and so we are able to turn to Jesus in full expectation of deliverance from sin and the promise of eternal life with our Saviour.

You are glorious God and You are rightly given honor and praise and You are blessed and holy. Thank You that we can be Your people and that You will condescend to be our God. How privileged we are and how blessed we are that we sinners can look forward to complete absolution in Jesus because of His horrible yet glorious work on the cross.

We praise You Lord in Jesus’ name

Amen