

Lesson 1

Salutation and Introduction

Galatians 1.1-10

Introduction

Can't you just hear Paul proclaiming, "It is the grace of Jesus Christ that validates your baptism, ensuring your sins are forgiven." And yet, we might also hear certain Jewish Christians countering his statement claiming, "Your baptism is void because you weren't circumcised prior to your baptism." Which one of these viewpoints truly represented God and Christ? Whose words should be accepted and trusted? To rectify this misunderstanding, Paul understood that they needed to place their trust and faith in his words.

Introduction to Galatians

Understanding Galatians 1.1-5

Galatians 1:1-5 (CSB)

1 Paul, an apostle—not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead—

**2 and all the brothers who are with me:
To the churches of Galatia.**

3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,

4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

**5 To him be the glory forever and ever.
Amen.**

OUTLINE:

A. 1.1-2: Paul's authority.

1. An apostle.
2. Chosen by Jesus and the Father.
3. The association of his companions.

B. 1.3-4: Paul's message.

1. Christ's death and resurrection.
2. For the purpose of deliverance.
3. The gospel's source: the will of God.

C. 1.5: For the glory of God.

Paul firmly identified himself as an apostle. However, his appointment wasn't a result of human intervention or decisions. Instead, it was both Jesus Christ and the very God who miraculously resurrected Jesus from the dead who had chosen and sent him on his mission. While

penning his letter, Paul wasn't alone. He conveyed greetings from everyone accompanying him, sending their collective warm wishes to all the congregations spread throughout Galatia.

In his introductory message, Paul combined the customary greetings from two cultures to emphasize unity. He melded the Roman greeting of "Grace" with the Jewish wish for "Peace." Through this, he conveyed blessings and tranquility from both God the Father and Jesus Christ, bridging the cultural divide.

The essence of Paul's message shone through as he shed light on the pivotal role of Jesus. Jesus, in an act of unparalleled sacrifice, gave up himself for the redemption of our sins. This selfless act wasn't just a random act of kindness; it served a greater purpose. It was intended to rescue us from the clutches of a world headed for destruction. The death of Jesus was an event that occurred once and for all and was absolutely essential. Nothing else could rescue mankind from his desperate condition. The usage of *rescue* in 1:4 should not be overlooked. Human beings could not deliver themselves from the bondage of sin. *Jesus* set us free. *Jesus* rescued us. Salvation does not come by works. And above all, it was in alignment with God's divine plan and wishes.

Closing his introduction, Paul emphasized a fundamental truth: that God's grandeur and magnificence should forever be acknowledged, and He should be glorified eternally.

How Judaizers Attacked Paul's Credibility

Christians within the church who were opposed to Paul and his teachings took aggressive steps to undermine his credibility as a preacher, teacher, and apostle. Their motive was clear: if they could tarnish his reputation, they could consequently weaken the influence of his message and teachings.

Paul's letters to the Corinthians, both the first and the second, shed light on the tactics and strategies employed by these detractors. Some of their tactics included critiquing him for not accepting financial support, suggesting that a true apostle would readily accept such support. Their assertion was that Paul's refusal was rooted in his awareness that he was not genuinely an apostle, as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:1-18. They also pushed Paul into a position where he had to defend his actions and character. Once he did, they would then accuse him of being an ostentatious individual who lacked genuine presence, referencing 1 Corinthians 10:8-18. Finally, they highlighted the fact that Paul's apostolic appointment was relatively recent, arguing that he didn't possess the true rights of an apostle because he wasn't a direct part of Jesus' earthly ministry. This is evident from the references in 1 Corinthians 9:1-6, 15:8-11, and 2 Corinthians 12:11-13.

There were certain aspects of Paul's history that made these accusations particularly damaging. First, Paul wasn't one of the followers of Jesus during His earthly ministry. Secondly, Paul was neither born nor brought up in Palestine. Instead, he traveled to Jerusalem for his studies, as outlined in Acts 22:3 and Galatians 1:14. Lastly, and perhaps most damaging, was Paul's history before his conversion. He was known to have persecuted and abused Christians, and his conversion to Christianity and subsequent appointment as an apostle came much later, well after Jesus' death and resurrection.

In the face of these challenges, Paul found it imperative to reaffirm his credibility among the Galatian Christians. He wanted them to fully grasp the all-encompassing sufficiency of Jesus. For Paul, it wasn't just about defending his personal honor, but it was crucial for him to establish that Jesus was indeed the perfect embodiment of God's divine plan and intentions.

No Other Gospel

Understanding Galatians 1.6-10

Galatians 1:6–10 (CSB)

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

7 not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!

9 As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!

10 For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

OUTLINE:

- A. 1.6: Paul's amazement.
- B. 1.7: There is only one gospel.
- C. 1.8-9: Warning of destruction.
- D. 1.10: Paul's only concern was properly representing Jesus Christ.

Paul was unequivocal in his assertion that the "good news" of grace through Jesus Christ was the sole authentic message. It astonished him, to the point of indignation, that many had swiftly abandoned this true "good news" in favor of a different version. The term "amazed" here is not just a simple surprise; it signifies a deep, almost resentful astonishment.

In addressing this, Paul laid out three essential points for clarification:

First, he highlighted that the alternative "good news" they had embraced was nothing more than a twisted version of the original message he had shared with them. It wasn't a new revelation or a deeper understanding; it was a misrepresentation.

Second, he took a firm stance against those who spread this distorted message. Paul categorically stated that anyone propagating a version of the "good news" that altered or distorted his original teachings was accursed, meaning they were estranged from God. These messengers, according to Paul, weren't representatives of God's will or word. On the contrary, they were enemies of God, deserving of His condemnation. To ensure his message was understood with the weight and severity it demanded, Paul reiterated his denunciation of these false teachers. This repetition wasn't merely for emphasis; it underscored the grave mistake of altering the true message.

Finally, Paul clarified his motivations. His primary goal was to accurately and faithfully represent God and Christ. He wasn't seeking validation, approval, or favor from the people. He was neither trying to be popular nor seeking to appease them. His only allegiance was to Christ, and he took his role as a devoted servant seriously. In all he did, Paul's overarching mission was to remain true to the teachings of Christ, regardless of the challenges or criticisms he faced.

Going Deeper with Paul's Contrast Between *the* Gospel and *Another* Gospel

Understanding Paul's distinction between the "good news" he shared and the "different" or "another good news" is crucial. To merely interpret Paul's concerns as doctrinal disagreements that divide brethren is to minimize the depth of his worry.

Paul's message, particularly to his non-Jewish audience, was clear and profound: Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had made it possible to grant anyone complete forgiveness and salvation. This means that through the grace of God, facilitated by Christ's sacrifice, anyone could be considered a son or daughter of God. This same grace, a powerful force revealed in Jesus' death and resurrection, held the ability to rescue any soul from the damning clutches of evil. To delve deeper into Paul's emphasis on the significance of the good news rooted in Jesus' death and resurrection, one should study 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, especially highlighting the transformative impact of the good news on the Corinthians as expressed in verses 1 and 2, as well as 1 Corinthians 2:1-5 and Romans 1:16-17.

However, the notion of a different or another version of the good news would essentially entail a pathway to God's grace, forgiveness, and all spiritual blessings without the necessity of Jesus' sacrifice or resurrection. It suggests an alternative doctrine that achieves everything Paul's Christ-centered message accomplishes, but remarkably without involving Christ. It would be a new form of the gospel, devoid of the presence of Christ. For Paul, the idea of such a doctrine was not just preposterous but utterly impossible.

Further, Paul articulated with clarity that the "different" gospel the Jewish Christians presented to the Galatian converts was a distorted version of the genuine good news he had shared, by incorporating the demands of ritual circumcision and Jewish customs. But the gravest concern for Paul was the shift in faith this caused: The Galatian converts were moving their trust from God's act in Jesus' death to their ritualistic actions. Instead of relying wholeheartedly on God's benevolence as exhibited on the cross, they began to put their faith in their deeds and rituals, erroneously believing that their salvation was a result of their actions rather than God's grace.

What's in This for Us?

This lesson has been a deep dive into the dynamics and teachings of Paul, especially concerning the Galatians and their interaction with the gospel message. What are three points of application that can be extracted for a modern audience?

The Centrality of Grace Over Works

Paul's teachings emphasize the importance of God's grace through Jesus Christ as *the* means of salvation. In today's context, many people still grapple with the idea of earning their salvation through good deeds, rituals, or religious practices. Paul's message to the Galatians serves as a reminder that salvation comes through faith in Christ and the grace extended through His sacrifice, not by human effort. This principle encourages believers to lean on faith and grace rather than trying to earn God's love or salvation.

Beware of Distorted Messages

The Galatians were presented with a distorted version of the gospel, which led them astray from the true teachings of Paul. In today's age of information overload and numerous interpretations of religious texts,

believers must be discerning in what they accept as truth. Misinformation, whether intentionally or unintentionally spread, can lead people away from the truth. It underscores the importance of deeply studying the Word, seeking guidance, and continually revisiting what we've learned so that we will not get off track.

Integrity in Religious Leadership

Paul's defense against the attacks on his credibility serves as a lesson in integrity and sincerity. As religious leaders or influencers in any field, individuals must be genuine in their intentions, unwavering in their faith, and transparent about their past. In the face of criticism or doubt, like Paul, leaders should stand firm in their convictions, always prioritizing the message and mission of Christ over personal acclaim or validation. We need to be less concerned with personal popularity and more focused on the authenticity and truthfulness of our message.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What was the core message of Paul regarding baptism and how would it have been challenged by certain Jewish Christians?
2. How does Paul establish his authority in the introduction to the Galatians?
3. Why did Paul merge Roman and Jewish greetings in his introduction, and what was its significance?
4. How did Paul describe Jesus' role in salvation, especially in relation to human efforts?
5. What were the tactics used by Christians opposed to Paul to discredit his teachings and how did these align with Paul's personal history?
6. Why was Paul so astonished by the Galatians' swift shift from the original "good news"?

7. How did Paul emphasize the grave mistake of distorting the original teachings of the "good news"?

8. What was Paul's main motivation in conveying his teachings and messages?

9. How does Paul differentiate between the original "good news" he preached and the "different" or "another good news"?

10. How did the incorporation of Jewish customs, like circumcision, affect the faith and belief of the Galatian converts according to Paul?