

Galatians 1

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's turn again for a little to the chapter we read in Galatians, in Galatians chapter 1. I want us to look at the first few verses.
- Paul, an apostle, not from men, nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. And then write down to verse 6, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.
- Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. Now, Paul's opening remarks to the church in Galatia were very different to his opening remarks in all the other letters that he wrote.
- For instance, when he wrote to the church in Philippi or the church in Ephesus, he thanked God for them. Now, on this occasion, he doesn't thank God for them.
- He still gives a greeting. He still gives them the greeting that is normal. But he doesn't thank God for them. Because there was a huge problem in this church.
- [1 : 3 3] This church was beginning to move away from the centrality of Jesus Christ, of salvation in Jesus Christ alone. They were beginning to move to a salvation that was Christ plus.
- It was, to be a Christian, you had to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, but that wasn't enough. You had to also take hold of the traditions, of the things of the past, of the old laws.
- Things like circumcision and holy days and certain foods and rituals and all these things. You couldn't just be a Christian by grace alone. And Paul is really angry about this.
- Because we find, in fact, with Paul that he deals here in a way that, in fact, he is actually telling the church that they are deserting God.
- It's very strong language. Verse 6, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace.
- [2 : 4 1] So that if we ever try to add to the grace of God, if we ever try to make out that the Christian faith, that the gospel of Jesus Christ, that there has to be more to it than simply what by grace alone, then we are guilty of the very same thing.
- And we are guilty of deserting God. It's a very solemn, solemn charge. Now, Paul is very clear in emphasizing his own authority as an apostle, his apostolic authority.
- Because this was something that the churches sometimes questioned. Because the apostle Paul wasn't one of the men that went round with Jesus.
- The early apostles, the likes of Peter and John and Andrew, these were men that the church and the churches round with Jesus. And had no problem believing were apostles because they had been part of the men that followed Jesus when he was here in this world.
- And he had given them this authority. And to be an apostle, there had to be a direct commission from the Lord Jesus Christ.

[3 : 55] A direct commission by Jesus. And the apostle also had to be a witness of the risen Jesus. And that's why some people were doubting that the apostle Paul was really an apostle.

Because they were saying to themselves, well, the apostle Paul wasn't a follower of Jesus when Jesus walked this world. In fact, Paul himself makes it very clear that he wasn't.

And they were saying, he didn't see the risen Jesus. Because Jesus, yes, he appeared to loads of people. But he only appeared to those who loved him and those who followed him.

So there was a lot of people in different churches. But particularly here you can see in this church who questioned that the apostle was really an apostle at all. So that's one of the things that Paul is dealing with when he says at the very beginning, he said, Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man.

In other words, it wasn't a man who made me an apostle. It wasn't even the church that called me. Now, today, if a person, we don't have the apostles as we had then.

[5 : 11] But if a person is called into the ministry, there has to be what we would say, there has to be an inward, first of all, an inward working, an inward calling, where God's Spirit is influencing, is drawing, is appealing to that person.

So that there is an inward movement of God's Spirit inclining, drawing, influencing a person in this direction.

But there has to be more. There also has to be the Word of God. The Word has to be coming, has to be very clear to that person. So that the inward movement of the Spirit along with the Word, these things are coming together.

And a person will come to a stage where he will believe that the Lord is calling him into the ministry. And it's at this point that he comes to the church. And so then that the church is then the body that will either establish that, or they'll say no.

They either accept or reject. There's various processes through a curcussion, then through the presbytery, and then through what used to be the training of the ministry, the board of ministry, where they deal with applicants.

[6 : 29] So that the church is recognizing. So in a sense today, although the ministry is, yes, it is of the Lord, it is also by man and through man that is the influence.

And there might be times when the church gets it wrong. There might be times when the church have made a wrong decision in that. It's one of the biggest responsibilities to sit on a committee that is deciding whether a person has a call from the Lord or not.

It's a huge, huge responsibility. And it's something that can weigh with people, or should weigh with people very, very heavily, where they're making that assessment, that judgment, the church's recognition of the gifts and the abilities.

And sometimes the church may get that wrong. But it's not sufficient for a person to go into the ministry by saying, if somebody says, or an elder or a minister said, you should go into the ministry, and the person just says, right, and puts themselves forward.

That would, I don't think that would be right at all. But what the apostle is saying here is, look, he said, it's nothing, it's not by man, nobody influenced me.

[7 : 50] This was by God. This was a direct call by the Lord Jesus Christ. And Paul, of course, was somebody, as he goes on.

There's various times where Paul gives his testimony, or gives bits of testimony in his writings. And this is one of them. Because he tells us a bit of what he had been like.

And Paul was somebody who just wasn't, it wasn't that he wasn't interested in the Christian faith. You know, sometimes you meet people and they just, they really are not interested in the Christian faith.

But they're not antagonistic. You can speak to them, and I just say, look, I've spoken to people and they just say, look, actually, I'm not interested. But they're not angry about it.

They just say, look, I'm sorry, but it just, it means nothing to me. But there are other people that can get quite agitated and quite angry if you speak to them about the Lord.

[8 : 52] Well, Paul was certainly in that category. And he went way beyond that. He hated the Lord Jesus Christ. So that that hatred, in fact, came out into his life.

And he became a persecutor of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if you had been in Jerusalem at the time when Stephen was stoned, and remember how those who were stoning Stephen laid their clothes at the feet of this young man, Saul.

And it seemed to have, that moment seemed to have fired him up in some way because it was after that he became almost the number one persecutor. It was like something about the blood of Stephen that seemed to have ignited in the heart of Saul just this bloodlust to kill Christians, to put them to death, to create havoc within the church.

And that's why I'm saying, if you had been around in the time of Stephen's martyrdom, and you said, looking around here, who do you think is going to become the biggest missionary, the greatest missionary in the church?

Church, you wouldn't for one second have thought, oh, that'll be that man, Saul. It wouldn't be in your thinking.

[10 : 09] In fact, you'd be saying to yourself, there's no point even going to speak to that man. He is so full of hatred towards the Lord Jesus Christ. And that's why, we've said it often enough before, never ever write anybody off.

Never think because of somebody's attitude or somebody's way, that there's no point ever speaking to them or ever praying for them. Because here's a prime example of somebody who seemed so, so far off, and yet it's somebody the Lord had huge plans and huge purposes for.

And so, the apostle Paul never forgot what he was. And that encouraged him. When he was converted, and when he became this missionary for the Lord Jesus Christ, that encouraged him to confront darkness, to confront the attitudes of carelessness and idolatry and enmity.

Because he'd been there. He knew. And that's, in many ways, why he was such a marvelous debater. Because he knew where people were at. He knew people's hearts.

He knew exactly the kind of prejudices and attitudes that people had against the Lord Jesus. And so, the apostle met these straight on. But he also knew something else.

[11 : 32] He knew the power of God. And he knew that the Lord had sent him out and that he was on a mission. And Saul never came to a place and thought, Oh, what's the point?

Because sometimes you can look around and think, What's the point? Paul never thought like that. He went to Corinth. And if there was any city in the world at that time where you would just say, Oh, forget it.

I'm out of here. And head away. It would be Corinth. Because it was the city where anything went. Whatever took your family, whatever you wanted, you could do.

It was a city with virtually no moral restraints of in any shape or form. And yet the Lord said to Paul, I have many souls yet in this city.

Paul looking out into the darkness of that city. The Lord was saying to him, You know this? I have loads of people. It was a city that was ripe for the gospel.

[12 : 32] And so the apostle was somebody who had this great mission to bring the gospel to people. So Paul is stressing so much that he is an apostle just in the same way as Peter and John and Andrew.

Because Paul had seen Jesus, as he tells it elsewhere, out of time. You remember, he hadn't seen Jesus, the risen Jesus, walking in this world, which, seeing the risen Jesus was a qualification of the apostle.

But Jesus had revealed himself from heaven, as a risen Jesus, to Saul. We all remember that journey down to Damascus where he was going to kill and create havoc and persecute.

And Jesus revealed himself to Saul. And Saul fell a broken man on the ground. Remember how Jesus was speaking to Saul and asking him why he was persecuting him, persecuting the church.

Saul, that was the turning point. That was a change. But he saw Jesus. He saw his glory. He saw the majesty of the risen Savior. He was blinded by it.

[13 : 52] He couldn't see. The glory of the risen Jesus was so great that he just fell a broken man. Remember that. Here's the chief persecutor, the person who did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God.

As far as Saul was concerned, Jesus Christ was an imposter. How dare he call himself the Son of God? Well, he saw. And the impact was life-changing.

In a moment, this man, full of attitude and arrogance, is a crumbling wreck on the ground, blinded by the glory of the Jesus he refused to believe in.

It's quite a thought. This vision, it's not just a vision, this reality of Jesus will become apparent again in this world when Jesus returns.

He will come in that glory. That glory that blinded the Apostle Paul. That glory that caused this man of arrogance and attitude to fall to the ground.

[14 : 58] Jesus is going to come back when he returns. That's how he's going to come. Not as a babe of Bethlehem. But he's going to come in all his splendor, all his majesty, all his glory and authority.

And the impact upon the world is going to be extraordinary. That's why we're told in the book of Revelation that those who have hated the Lord Jesus Christ, those who are opposed to him, they're going to call on the mountains and the hills and the rocks to fall on them and to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb.

Because they can't bear. They cannot bear to look upon his glory. See, on that day there will not be one atheist, one agnostic, one mocker, one scoffer.

Everybody is going to crumble in a wreck before the glory. Just as it happened to Saul. Jesus came, of course, to Saul with a direct, deliberate mission.

It was to rescue him. It was to save him. It was to set him free. It was to make him one of his own. But when Jesus returns in judgment, what a thought when we see the impact that it had just on this man.

[16 : 12] But even although this church is still a church that has disappointed and hurt the apostle, we find that in verse 3, even although he doesn't thank God for the church, he still greets the church and he says to them, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that's a lovely way to grace and peace. Of course, grace and peace come together all the time. It would be a lovely way to greet our friends, our family, everybody, the grace and the peace of God.

Of course, grace and peace are intertwined. It is by grace that we are saved and when we are saved we experience peace. We didn't just, I doubt anybody had as dramatic a conversion as the Apostle Paul in here.

you may be able to point to an actual time or whatever and you might be able to say, I know the day, I know the hour, I know the minute when I came to faith. But most people can't do that.

Most people cannot be specific like that. The Lord is gradually working within their lives till they come to, they know that the Lord has brought them out of darkness into light.

[17 : 29] But for some people it's clear, Paul could always tell, he could take it to the spot on their own. He said, that's where the Lord, that's where the Lord dealt with me, right there.

Never forget it. But some people can't do that. Some people can. But anyway, it's by God's grace. And Paul again was this example.

Paul had nothing. Couldn't bring anything to the Lord and say, well Lord, you actually owed me that salvation. No, he says, I had nothing. In fact, that was one of Paul's great arguments to the Jewish churches about how their Jewishness actually wasn't going to work for them.

Because he said, if there was any Jewish man ever who had all the credentials, who could tick all the boxes, it was him. And he says, see all my Jewishness?

And Paul was proud of his Jewishness, not in a bad way. At no point did he ever want to ever be anything other than a Jew. He was quite passionate about that.

[18 : 38] But with regard to salvation, he took all the Jewishness, all the rituals, all the people that he had come from, his heredity, and being in the right tribes, and having all the right things as a Jew.

He said, I'm putting it all in a box. It's all rubbish. I'm throwing it away. I don't want, it's got nothing to do with my salvation. It cannot save me. It's grace and grace alone.

And that grace brings peace. That's why Paul is always using the words grace and peace. And peace is both a state and a condition. We are brought into a state of peace the moment we are saved.

In other words, as far as it's a legal document is concerned, God says, I am at peace with you now. Because of what Jesus has done, the condemnation you were under, it's removed.

My wrath, which was hanging over you, has been taken away. You and I are now together. All that was there in the background has been removed.

[19 : 52] We are now on the one level. So that's the state. And then there's the condition where we actually experience that peace. Because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, we enjoy that peace within our heart.

There is that sense of peace, the peace of God that passes all understanding. And then Paul goes on and he says to them, Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age.

This is what Jesus did and why he did it. He gave himself for our sins. And that again is just one of the most wonderful things. Because when Jesus, we've got to realize that when Jesus gave himself, he never did anything that he was forced to do.

You know, sometimes we have to do, we do things and we don't want to do them. Sometimes we do things which are totally against our will and we say to himself, I just, this is going against my will.

But we end up doing them. Well, Jesus didn't do anything that was against the Father's will. Yes, it was difficult. And there was a point where there was almost a conflict where Jesus struggled for a moment.

[21 : 16] His whole humanity was in that almost convulsions of anguish at the prospect of what he had to endure in Gethsemane. And he prayed and he prayed and he prayed and he prayed and, oh, Father, if it is possible.

But he was strengthened. And from there he went on, to do thy will I take delight. So, we never think of the cross as something that Jesus went to reluctantly.

He went to willingly because he and the Father were one. So, Jesus was never forced to do anything. But he gave himself.

He couldn't do more. Didn't send an angel to do the work. He came himself and he came as a sacrifice for our sins.

And, you know, this is one of the things that makes the Christian faith so completely different to all the other faiths and isms. The Lord Jesus Christ, as we know, is a great teacher and we follow his teaching.

[22 : 26] But it's far more than that. There's a lot of world religions and a lot of leaders of world religions and those who follow the teachings of those who they follow.

but their leaders didn't come or didn't, they weren't sacrifices. They themselves a sacrifice for them.

They, the world leaders, religious leaders, didn't lay down their life for all their followers. Jesus did. This is a massive distinguishing factor to the Christian faith.

that Jesus came to pay by his life, with his death, for all your sins and my sins.

And with all due respect to all the other world religions, you don't have the leaders having done that. Nobody could do this except one who was God.

[23 : 37] And yet God couldn't die. This is the amazing thing and that's why Jesus Christ, that is why the Son of God took to himself human nature in order to die.

Everything that was done from coming into this world until his death and resurrection was done for you and me. It wasn't done for him. It was done for you and me. And that's where we see the magnificence, the extravagance of his love.

It's beyond, it's sometimes beyond our understanding. So this is, this is what, what, what Jesus did. And then we're told why he did it in order to deliver us from this present evil age.

Jesus' work was a delivering mission. That's what, it was a rescue mission. this word deliver is the same word that is used of in Acts and talking about how God delivered his people out of Egypt, out of the bondage of the slavery that they were in and the death.

Same word that is used of Peter when he was delivered by the angel in prison because Peter was going to be put to death. It's a deliverance from death. And that's what we're told here.

[24 : 57] that who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age. That's what the world is, an evil, this present evil age.

There are only two ages, the age we're living in and the age to come. And if you're a believer today, you have started living a little in the age to come, the age of eternal life.

Because the moment you're born again, things have changed. You have already started to be taken out from this present evil age. That is the attitude, the spirit, the philosophies, the aims of this world, which are completely opposed to the way and the will of God.

And that's what the Lord has said, that's what Paul has said, that's why Jesus came to deliver you from this. Because this world is under the sentence of death. This is a dying world.

And I think sometimes people forget that. And don't get me wrong, by all means, let us do everything that we can.

[26 : 14] It's a creation mandate to look after the world that we've been given. but what people have got to remember, and you know, this whole idea of saving the planet, yes, by all means, let us act wisely and well in these things.

We do have a responsibility to them. But we've also got to remember that it's not going to be saved forever. It's going to be burnt up with fire. The Lord is going to come.

There is an end in sight. And it's not something that's going to go on forever. The spirit of the age thinks it is. It isn't.

And that's where the Lord has come to deliver us from this present evil age. And then we see Paul then says after this, I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Paul just can't get over it. See, Paul loves this church. This is a church that Paul just heard about. This is a church that Paul himself was involved in establishing.

[27 : 34] He's a father figure to them. And he's hurt. He's really hurt. He's hurt personally. And he's hurt for the Lord. How can you? See, Paul understood all the Jewish rituals.

He had been steeped in them. When he became a Christian, he just felt so free. I remember when I was a young boy, I had a pictorial pilgrim's progress.

A pilgrim's progress in pictures, just like a comic book, but with little stories and it was done that way. And I still remember the picture of Christian who had this huge burden on his back and seeing the burden, this huge burden as he stood by the cross, falling, tumbling down, and just this sense of, whoa, I'm free.

And Paul was saying, that's the gospel. All these other things, they just tangle you up. And he said, I can't believe that you're beginning to get tangled up again with all these things.

Because let me tell you, Paul is saying, there is no other gospel but the one. If anybody says it's Jesus Christ and it's other things as well, that is not the gospel.

[28 : 59] And Paul actually says that person should be accursed. Even if an angel from heaven comes and tells you that, it should be cursed. There is only the one gospel.

It is the grace of God in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the only thing, the only one you can build your life upon. Is that who you're building your life upon today?

Or are you building on something else or someone else? If so, it'll crumble. It won't last. Only Jesus.

Let us pray. O Lord, we pray that you will bless us with every spiritual blessing. We give thanks for the liberty and the freedom of this gospel.

We give thanks, O Lord, for all that it brings to us and all that it brings us into. We give thanks that we have, in Jesus Christ, entered into eternal life and that we will go on and on into the fullness of that eternal life when we leave this world.

[30 : 07] O Lord, we pray then to be with us. We pray for health and strength and body, mind and soul for each one. We pray to bless the cup of tea, coffee in the hall. We pray to take us to our home safely.

Do us good and take away all our sin in Jesus' name. Amen. Concluding from the Scottish Psalter in Psalm number 71.

Psalm number 71, Scottish Psalter in the Tunis Tracathro. And we're going to sing from verse 14 to verse 17.

But I with expectation will hope continually, and yet with praises more and more I will they magnify. Thy justice and salvation my mouth abroad shall show, even all the day, for I thereof the numbers do not know.

And I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord, and thine own righteousness even thine alone I will record. For even from my youth, O God, by thee I have been taught, and hitherto I have declared the wonders thou hast brought.

[31 : 17] 14 to 17, page 311, Psalm 71. Because I am with expectation will hope continually and yet with reasons more and more I will be magnified thy justice and salvation thy mouth thou brought shall show in all the day are high thereof the numbers do not know and

I will constantly go on in strength of God the Lord and thy own righteousness in thine alone I will record for even from earth for my new earth O God by thee I have been taught and hither too I have declared the wonder the wonder thou hast drawn may the grace and peace of God the

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