

Introduction and Galatians 1:1-9

“Only One Gospel”

1. Begin with prayer and read Galatians 1:1-9 [5 minutes].

2. Discuss the introduction to Paul’s letter to the Galatians [10 minutes].

- A. Pastoral letter by Paul to loose federation of Galatian congregations in area within Asia Minor (modern day Turkey or Türkiye) and probably written around 50 A.D., only 15-20 years after Crucifixion; perhaps Paul's earliest letter in New Testament
- B. Dispute among scholars as to “north” Galatia or “south” Galatia; likely choice is south Galatia and congregations in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, established during Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13-14)
- C. Divisions along racial, social, and theological lines all due to Jewish Christians from Jerusalem requiring Gentile Christians to adhere to Law of Moses, from both ceremonially and morally, as means of being in right relationship with God; includes dietary restrictions, mandatory circumcision, and moral law-keeping
- D. Fundamental issue of how people are saved: 1) Jesus by grace through faith alone? Or 2) Jesus plus human actions or plus something else humans contribute?
- E. Paul’s authority as apostle to the Gentiles devalued and denied
 - *Occasionally we hear calls for 21st-century congregations return to the pristine purity of the New Testament church. What does the reality of real church fellowship among the Galatian churches tell us about such ideals?*
 - *Why will settling the debate about the Law of Moses for Gentile and Jewish Christians be crucial for the continuing growth of the early Christian movement?*

3. Discuss Paul’s greeting to his letter to the Galatians in Galatians 1:1-5 [15 minutes].

- A. Author is clearly Paul, according to v. 1: one of New Testament epistles almost uniformly agreed by commentators across theological spectrum as written by Paul
- B. Also clearly states authority as apostle, term meaning “to be sent,” used to designate officially authorized representatives; office of apostle ends after first century A.D.
- C. Designation of Paul as apostle (officially authorized representative) does not come by human action, but “by Jesus Christ himself and by God the Father” (v. 1 NLT)
- D. Clear expression of substitutionary work of Jesus, as he gives his life “to rescue us from this evil world” in an expression of God’s grace and peace (vv. 3-4 NLT)
- E. Tim Keller on human need for rescue: “We love to be our own saviors. Our hearts love to manufacture glory for themselves. So we find messages of self-salvation extremely attractive, whether they are religious (*Keep these rules and you earn eternal blessing*) or secular (*Grab hold of these things and you’ll experience blessing*)”

now.) The gospel comes and turns them all upside down. It says: *You are in such a hopeless position that you need a rescue that has nothing to do with you at all.* And then it says: *God in Jesus provides a rescue which gives you far more than any false salvation your heart may love to chase.* (Tim Keller, *Galatians for You*, 17)

- *Paul starts by establishing his credentials as coming directly from God. Why is this necessary? How are Paul's credentials often denigrated even today?*
- *There are many "messages of self-salvation" many people find appealing today. Give at least two examples, one of them "religious" and the other "secular." How does the gospel respond to them both?*

4. Discuss Paul's shocked response to the falling away of the Galatian Christians in Galatians 1:6-9 [15 minutes].

- A. Paul dismayed Galatians "turning away so soon from God" by following a religion "that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all" (vv. 6-7 NLT) by teachers who "deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ" (v. 7 NLT)
- B. Strong, even harsh response by Paul, but warranted by false teaching that while belief in Jesus necessary, such belief in itself is not enough because you must add to it your personal obedience to Mosaic Law (again, not just ceremonially, but also morally)
- C. John Stott summarizes this false teaching: "In other words, you must let Moses finish what Christ has begun. Or rather, you yourself must finish, by your obedience to the law, what Christ has begun. You must add your works to the work of Christ." (John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 11)
- D. Characteristics that may reveal this "Jesus + my work" dynamic is present: 1) you emphasize your personal religious experience over core Biblical teaching; 2) you emphasize your adherence to rules and regulations over your need for rescue by Jesus by grace through faith; 3) you emphasize the sincerity of your belief over whether you are trusting in the right object of your belief
- E. Issue is foundational to the preaching/teaching/living of the Good News: those who preach or teach any other sort of Good News are cursed by God (literally, "anathema"), even Paul, even an angel from heaven (vv. 8-9)
 - *Is Paul over-reacting here? Talk about your response not just to his message, but to his tone. How would such a response be received today?*
 - *What modern-day examples do we have of religious faiths that pretend to be Christianity, or pretend to accomplish what Christianity does? How can we fairly make such evaluations?*

5. Close in prayer.