

Auburn Baptist Church  
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## Dear Church - A Study of the Book of Galatians

### Part 2: Paul, An Apostle

*Galatians 1:1-2, 11-24*

Last week we began a study of the book of Galatians, a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the churches in Galatia (an area which is in modern Turkey). Paul had established the churches during his first missionary journey. We noted that this letter was written with urgency and rebuke to these early believers because they were beginning to fall under the influence of false teachers.

There were a group of false teachers called Judaizers, who were following in Paul wake and throwing the churches he had started into confusion by teaching them that true salvation came not just through faith and belief in Jesus Christ, but also through following the law of Moses, including being circumcised and living righteously.

The Judaizers were altering the Gospel. They were teaching another gospel that was a perversion of the truth and Paul was upset, because this altering of the gospel wouldn't save people! It would condemn them to hell all the while assuring them of heaven. Paul wrote to these young Christians that anyone, even an angel from heaven, or he himself, who came preaching or teaching a gospel other than salvation through faith in Christ Jesus alone was accursed!

Unfortunately, these false teachers didn't just stop at attacking Paul's message of salvation. In order, to convince these young believers that Paul was wrong in his Gospel and they were right, they attacked Paul and his authority as well, and that is what we are going to look at today.

Read with me if you will **Galatians 1:1-2, and 11-12.**

**"Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia...**

**I want you to know, brothers and sister, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."**

The false teachers not only questioned Paul's message, they questioned his authority to teach and preach it. Their accusations stemmed from the fact that they new Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles, therefore they claimed that he got his information second-hand and must have gotten it muddled up. They said Paul was a preacher or teacher who must have heard about the message of salvation from someone who didn't know Christ well or the events of His life and therefore he was not an authority of the subject and you don't have to listen to him, because he is

obviously trying to please the Gentiles and was watering down the gospel by leaving out the parts concerning circumcision, and following Mosaic law, etc.

These false teachers, on the other hand, were claiming that they had the correct version of the gospel because they got it directly from the lips of the apostles (or so they say) and they could be trusted to know the truth.

## **I. PAUL DEFENDS HIS APOSTLESHIP**

So, the first thing Paul does is to defend his calling as an apostle of the risen Christ. In verses one and two that we just read, he boldly states his position and calling in his manner of introduction. **"Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brothers and sisters with me,"**

Right off the bat, Paul claims his status as an apostle and not someone sent by the apostles or any man for that matter, but by Christ and God the Father. Why is this important? What is he saying? To get a good understanding of this we need to understand what an apostle is, especially in the Biblical sense of the word.

### **A. DEFINING APOSTLESHIP**

In Biblical times an apostle was a person in a unique position. An apostle was someone who was a special emissary, a representative with unique authority to act and/or speak on behalf of the person or government or power that sent them. The closest we may have in America today would be an American ambassador. They not only represent America and our government in foreign countries, but they also have the power and authority to act and/or speak on behalf of the American government and people in those countries where they work.

However, there is more to it. An Apostle of Jesus Christ had a few more qualifications that were understood in the ancient world. They had seen Christ face-to-face. They had experienced living with Him, hearing His words and teachings directly from his own lips. They were first-hand witnesses to Christ's life, death, and resurrection. They were distinguished and set apart and uniquely commissioned by Christ himself to take His message to the world. The Apostles were divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit and received divine revelation directly from Christ and then through the Holy Spirit.

Today, we often get the terms disciples and apostles mixed up, because the apostles were initially disciples of Christ. A disciple is a student, learner, or follower. However, when Christ distinguished the twelve men by giving them a unique assignment and separating them from the crowd of other disciples, he made them apostles.

**Luke 6:12-13, "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles."**

Notice the distinction. The disciples or learners and followers of Christ were large in number. But he specifically chose twelve of them to be apostles. Apostleship was a unique distinction. After years of being Christ's disciple, of hearing his teachings directly from his lips, living with him, learning spiritual doctrine directly from him, etc. the Apostles were commissioned and given a divine authority that was not given to every disciple.

## **B. NO MODERN APOSTLES**

Our twenty-first century understanding of true biblical apostleship is confused because many people have watered down or altered the biblical definition and understanding of what an Apostle of Christ really is. There are many people today who claim to be apostles of Christ. They look at the short definition of apostleship as being a messenger commissioned to speak for Christ and say that they or all believers are commissioned messengers for Christ to take His message to the world and therefore, we are all apostles.

Look again at that list of qualifications for Biblical apostleship. Is there anyone who fits all of those qualifications today? Is there anyone alive today who had first-hand experience of seeing, listening to, and living with Christ and learning directly from Him? Of course not. There are no apostles alive today according to the true Biblical definition of what an apostle was. There is no such thing as apostolic succession. We follow the traditions and teachings of the apostles but there are no apostles alive today that fit the biblical understanding of what a true apostle was.

So, what about Paul? He wasn't one of the twelve chosen by God to be an apostle. How can he call himself and apostle? Look again at those qualifications for Biblical apostleship. You know the story of the conversion of Paul.

Did he meet Jesus face-to-face? Yes. On the road to Damascus (Acts 9).

Was he directly commissioned by God to take His gospel message to the world, specifically to the Gentile world? Yes (Acts 9:15 - Christ tells Ananias that He has personally chosen Paul to be his instrument to proclaim his name to the Gentile world.

Did he learn the gospel message and spiritual doctrine from Christ, himself, and not from other men? Yes. This is what **Galatians 1:15-20** is explaining to us. **"But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie."**

These verses are a brief autobiography of how Paul was delivered by Christ, commissioned by Christ, taught by Christ directly (3 years in Arabia) and saw none of the other apostles until after being in Arabia 3 years being taught by divine revelation from Christ himself.

Paul didn't get his message or his mission from any man. **Verses 11 and 12 of Galatians 1, "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."**

This is why Paul can be called an apostle. This is why he can confidently say, I got my message first-hand from Christ, not from another apostle or brother or sister. I was commissioned to preach by Christ, not by a person, or group, or church, or denomination.

## **II. APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY**

Why is this important? Why am I, and why did Paul make such a big deal about the fact that he was an apostle and not a disciple or a preacher, or pastor-teacher, or evangelist like we are today? Why is it inaccurate for people today to claim the title of Apostle of Christ?

Because the Apostles of Christ had a unique authority that no one else had. They had direct divine authority from Christ and God the Father. This means that the opinions, the words, the teachings of the apostles were the opinions, the words and the teachings of Jesus Christ, Himself. They were uniquely commissioned and inspired by the Holy Spirit in a manner that we are not today. Apostolic authority is Divine authority, and the early churches knew this.

**Acts 2:42**, shows us that they apostles' doctrine were studied by the early church, because they were the ones who had lived and walked and witnessed the life of the Savior. The apostles were the ones who had received their doctrine and teachings directly from the mouth of God. Therefore, in the absence of the physical presence of Christ, their words and teachings were accepted as coming from Christ, Himself, which with the empowering of the Holy Spirit, they were.

### **A. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PAUL**

In the Apostle Paul's case, this meant that he had the authority to speak for God in such a way that his words could be taken as being from the mouth of God, himself. It meant that his words and teachings were divinely inspired and thus they must be obeyed as the words and commands of God. It meant that he was telling them what God said and that the gospel he preached was the true divinely inspired gospel - not the one being taught by the Judaizers.

Paul defended his Apostolic authority because of the gospel message that authority brought. If he wasn't an apostle than his gospel message was just as valid as the Judaizers altered gospel. Can you see why he had to defend his position and calling as an Apostle? His authority and the authority of his message as truth was at stake.

### **B. WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US**

For Christian's today it means that the words written by the apostles and preserved for us in the Bible can be taken as the very words of God, and as such must be submitted to and obeyed. It means that these letters, penned by Paul are the very words of God as He inspired Paul to write them. Therefore, they are divine Scripture and we must obey them and bow in submission to them as if they were penned by the very hand of God, because they were. If Paul were not an Apostle, then those who read his letters in ancient times and those of us who read them today are free to reject what he said if we don't like them or agree with them, because they wouldn't be God's words, they'd just be one man's opinions and interpretations, which are just as valid as any other man's.

This also means that those who claim to be apostles of Christ today, need to think a little more deeply about their claim and take it to its logical conclusion. For if they are indeed apostles, as defined by scripture, that means they have the same divine authority as the apostle Paul. That would mean that if they didn't like or agree with something Paul wrote, then they could dismiss it as being his view of doctrines and that their own opinions and views of doctrine were equally as valid as Paul's and therefore they wouldn't have to obey the writings of Paul or submit to them as divine authority, because Paul's authority would be the same as their own.

It would also elevate their own words and teachings and doctrines to the level of divine authority - which I find utterly terrifying considering what some people and churches are teaching today that is in direct contrast to what is written in Scripture.

There are no apostles today in the true biblical sense of the word. Yes, we are witnesses of Christ and we are called to take His good news to the world, but we are not apostles. We are teachers, we are evangelists, we are preachers, we are pastors, we are prophets, we are brothers and sisters (as Paul described those with him in Galatians 1:2), but we are not apostles. None of us received direct teaching from Jesus Christ. Ours came from man. None of us lived and walked and learned directly from the Master's mouth. None of us physically bore witness to his life, death, and resurrection.

And while we have the authority and calling to preach the good news, we do not have the divine authority to change the message or create a new one. We do not have the authority that makes our words and teachings and doctrine on the level of coming directly from Christ. Yes, the Holy Spirit inspires us and moves us and gives us words to speak and understanding we necessary, but we do not have the authority to change the words of Scripture, to elevate our own opinions and ideas to the level of divinity, or to chose to disobey or disregard the words of the true apostles simply because we do not agree with them. If we did this, we would be disobeying and disregarding the very words of God. And we would be no better than the Judaizers bringing an altered gospel and living under the curse of God.

We are not free to pick and chose what we will obey and what we won't obey of divine scripture, not even if it was written by an apostle and not one of the four gospels. For even Peter, who was one of the original twelve apostles, which no one questions as having divine authority, acknowledged Paul as an apostle and his words and Scripture.

**2 Peter 3:15-16, "Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvations, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction."**

What Paul wrote belongs alongside the rest of Scripture. And all Scripture is given by inspiration of God. Holy men spoke for God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. We can accept the gospel as written by Paul because it came from heaven. It is the true gospel not received from men, but from God. Those are apostolic credentials.

Paul's words are God's words. They are not to be ignored or disobeyed or changed. They are to be obeyed whether or not we agree with them or understand them.

#### PRAYER

Father, it is so refreshing for us to come to Your Word. It's radiant, truthful glory shines on every page. We thank You that we can trust the gospel. How horrible it would be to be in a religion that teaches lies; sends people to hell, thinking they're going to heaven. They only hope we have to escape death and judgment and hell is the true gospel and receiving it as a gift of grace by faith alone.

Help us to understand and embrace that gospel fully with all our hearts. Receive the gift of salvation, the forgiveness of sin, eternal life in Christ, and then proclaim it. This is so precious. It cannot be altered in any way. Give us opportunity, Lord to believe with all our hearts the true gospel, and then with all our strength to proclaim it. May it spread to Your glory.