

GALATIANS AND YOU

Studies in the Epistle of Paul
to the Galatians

by

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Chapter Two

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

Revelation from JESUS

Galatians 1:11-24

Passing from the **Introduction**, we come now to the first of the three main divisions of the epistle, 1:11-2:21. In this section we find Paul defending his apostleship on two fronts. He first shows that he has received his Gospel and commission to proclaim it directly from the LORD JESUS CHRIST Himself. Then he proceeds to make clear that, far from preaching a message and carrying on a work at variance with the views and policies of the church at Jerusalem, as was charged by the false teachers, he had, on the contrary, been granted the fullest endorsement of his ministry by the apostolic council held in that church to settle the issue of the status of the Gentile converts (Galatians 2).

Pursuing the first of the two above mentioned lines of defense, the apostle unfolds to his readers, in 1:11-24, that the revelation from JESUS CHRIST had been made known to him (verses 11, 12), in him (verses 13-17), and through him (verses 18-24).

Revelation from JESUS to Paul (verses 11,12)

"But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man" (Galatians 1:11). In the expression, "the gospel which was preached of men," Paul has particularly in mind those distinctive principles which were just the opposite of the teachings of the errorists - such principles as freedom from the bondage of the law and justification by faith entirely apart from works. The apostle assures his readers that this Gospel which he made known to them while in their midst was "not, as to its nature, human" (K.S. Wuest). In short, he certifies its divine origin.

"Certify" is a word of potency. We buy with confidence food and drug products bearing this label. There are times when, as in the purchase of a home, for example, an ordinary check will not be accepted in payment; it must be certified. And yet how easily men and women who pride

themselves upon their shrewdness in business matters are taken in by all sorts of fantastic isms and vagaries in the realm of religion. With eternal destiny hanging in the balance, it is assuredly the most arrant folly to accept a so-called gospel which is not divinely accredited.

"For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:12). In the words, "by the revelation of Jesus Christ," the apostle is referring, not to the appearance of the LORD to him on the road to Damascus - although that, of course, is necessarily involved - but to the communication of the Gospel to him by none other than the LORD JESUS, in its basic features or structural framework at the time of his conversion, and in fuller details afterwards. While obviously none of us today are, or can be, the recipients of revelation as were Paul and the other writers of the New Testament, let us never waver in our conviction that the Word of Life entrusted to us to make known to the world is the truth of GOD and not a dream of man. What we believe of the Gospel governs what we achieve with it. We must have a conviction of authority to witness with the authority of conviction. If we are going after men with a gospel that is "after man," we may as well turn back before we get started.

It may not be out of place, while we are still on this subject of the apostle's independence of human authority, to add one or two further observations. We make a very serious mistake if we construe verse 12 as affording Scriptural warrant for little or no training for the ministry or for lowering the educational requirements for ordination. Revelation closed with the Apostolic Age. The young man or woman called of the LORD into full-time Christian service today needs and should seek the best scholastic preparation obtainable; but let it be under teachers who, in addition to their scholarship and intellectual competence, have a firm and deep-rooted belief in the Bible as the authoritative and inerrant Word of GOD. Teachers of the Word should be learners on the Word. There is in our day altogether too much wresting of Scripture instead of a resting on Scripture.

Revelation from JESUS in Paul (verses 13-17)

"For ye have heard of my conversation (manner of life) in time past in the Jews' religion."

The apostle in verses 13 and 14 takes occasion to remind his readers of his course of life prior to his conversion, a career marked by brilliant promise of advancement and by intense zeal for the religion of the fathers. What he thus writes of his prospects as a future leader in the religious life of his own people is not an overstatement but an understatement of facts; for, in the opinion of not a few scholars best qualified to pass judgment, Paul possessed the greatest mind of his generation and could undoubtedly have risen to the loftiest heights of eminence in any one of several fields he might have chosen to enter. Be that as it may, when Paul, praised to the skies by his religious contemporaries in Judaism, met JESUS face to face on the road to Damascus, he was shocked into an awareness of the fact that the commendation of men was no insurance against the condemnation of GOD - a salutary consideration that may well be taken to heart by highly gifted but Christless leaders in our own time.

"how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it." Although freely forgiven by the mercy of GOD, Paul could never forgive himself for the havoc he had wrought in the Church by his ruthless persecution of believers in those bitter years before he was brought to know the LORD. What would he not have given to undo the damage thus inflicted! These

painful memories cost him many a sleepless night and kept him ever a humble suppliant at the throne of grace. Oh, yes, Paul had been thoroughly sincere in his attacks on Christianity - and also, be it said, terribly misled by the devil. Sincerity of conscience and security in JESUS may be as far apart as the east is from the west. It is more than likely that our LORD may have had Paul in mind when in the midst of His farewell discourse He said to His disciples, **"Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service"** (John 16:2).

"being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." In using this expression, "the traditions of my fathers," the apostle had reference, not to the Mosaic law as found in the Pentateuch, but to the hedge of more than six hundred human commandments which the old rabbis had built around the law for purposes, as they thought, of protection. Paul's violence against the Christians was so excessive largely because in his mind the growth of the Church would sound the death knell of the Pharisaism to which he was so fanatically devoted. And who shall say that his fears were wholly groundless? There are man-made systems today, respectable enough in themselves, that are as far removed from evangelical Christianity as was Pharisaism of old, and that command the loyalty of countless devoted adherents. We need not enlarge upon the lamentable fact that there are hosts of people today who would rather win the favor of the world through holding to the traditions of men than seek the mercy of the LORD through contrition for sin at the foot of the Cross. How tragically shortsighted to be more concerned about one's standing with men than with GOD.

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace." From the vantage point of his new life, Paul could see how even from birth he had been ordained of GOD for the work of his apostleship to the Gentiles; and he was brought to realize, furthermore, that through all the circumstances of his life, not excluding his fierce warfare against the Church, the LORD had been ruling and overruling in the furtherance of that ultimate objective. GOD will not be thwarted. His plans come to fruition despite all opposition. He makes even the wrath of man to praise Him (Psalm 76:10). It behooves each of us to know and do God's will for his or her life. Disobedience ensures failure. To spurn His appointment is to meet disappointment. If GOD wants you for His service, do not turn a deaf ear to that call. We must be in the center of His will to draw on the treasures of His grace.

"to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen." Note the words "his Son." GOD revealed to Paul a CHRIST who was His Son. In the Gospel records we find three occasions when GOD witnessed to the divine Sonship of JESUS, namely, at the baptism (Matthew 3:17), at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5), and at the visit of the Greeks on Tuesday of Passion Week (John 12:28). And yet there are men who have the temerity and effrontery to pay more heed to the doubts of skeptics than to the Father's testimony with regard to the nature of CHRIST's person. We follow a Christ of man's contrivance when we strip the crown of deity from the brow of JESUS: **"And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world"** (I John 4:3).

"to reveal his Son in me." It is to be borne in mind that not only was CHRIST revealed to Paul at the time of the risen Saviour's appearance to him on the road to Damascus; but He also revealed *in Paul* through the ministration of the HOLY SPIRIT. And this twofold revelation, the object and the subjective, was to the end that *through Paul* the LORD JESUS might be made

known to the heathen, that is to say, to the Gentiles among whom the apostle was called to labor. This triple manifestation of the SAVIOUR is of the very essence of an effective Gospel witness in any time or place.

Let us showing of stereopticon pictures serve as a suggestive analogy of the process. The slide is put into the lantern where it is made translucent by the light in the machine, so that the picture on the slide may be flashed upon the screen for the people in the room to see. Even so, the revelation of GOD in CHRIST must be objectively presented to us through the written or spoken word or through some other external medium; but this objective presentation will be ineffective apart from the inward illumination by the SPIRIT: **"But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned"** (I Corinthians 2:14) and **"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any many have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his"** (Romans 8:9). Then and only then can CHRIST be seen in us by those with whom we associate from day to day.

"Immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood." Paul mentions this fact to indicate that there was no need for him to submit his commission from CHRIST to any man or group of men for their endorsement. This has some bearing upon the proper reaction of the young man or woman today who feels called of the LORD into full-time Christian service. While all due weight should be given to the opinions of those who seem best qualified to offer advice, care must be taken lest the still, small voice of JESUS be drowned in a din of human counsels. In the last analysis the final decision as to one's life work is a matter to be settled between the LORD and the individual immediately concerned. Never let what people think the LORD wants you to do stand in the way of what the LORD tells you He wants you to be and do.

"Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus" (Galatians 1:17). Continuing to emphasize his independence of the Twelve, Paul states that, instead of going up to Jerusalem to confer with the apostles, he went into Arabia. How long he remained there we have no way of knowing, but it must have been at least a year. There can, however, be little question as to the purpose of this retreat. Following the revolutionary upset in his way of thinking and his whole outlook upon life, brought about by his conversion on the Damascus road, Paul felt himself in desperate need of a protracted period of seclusion for prayer and meditation. He required uninterested leisure for formulating and organizing the materials of the message he was commissioned to carry to the Gentiles. It was not in the make-up of the apostle to go forth until he was prepared to proclaim the Gospel. And we may be sure that during the weeks and months of his retirement in Arabia he received more than one special revelation from his new-found LORD and SAVIOUR. An ever deepening communion with JESUS CHRIST was the all-important consideration. Conferences with church leaders could wait until later, and even then they would have no binding authority upon him.

All this reminds us of our need as Christian workers. Do we spend enough time in secret communion with JESUS? Magnitudes of truth come to bloom in hours of solitude with GOD. Spiritual snapshots need to be developed from negatives into finished photographs. Even our fellowships in CHRIST, however rich and sweet, can never make up for the lack of time spent in fellowship with Him. How we let Him speak to us conditions how we speak for Him.

Revelation from JESUS through Paul (verses 18-24)

"Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days" (Galatians 1:18). The word for "see" brings out the purely personal character of this visit. Paul visited Peter as an equal; not by the farthest stretch of the imagination can Peter be said to have launched Paul upon his apostolic career. This is not to say, however, that Paul was not wondrously blessed in a spiritual way from his two weeks of intimate visitation with one who, in company with the other disciples, had been so close to JESUS during the years of His earthly ministry. And the warmer our love for the SAVIOUR, the sweeter will be hours spent with others "of like precious faith." But be sure to let JESUS visit with you before you visit with Peter.

"But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19). It is hardly needful, perhaps, to mention that James, the Lord's brother, was not one of the twelve apostles. In fact, it was not until after CHRIST's resurrection that James: **"After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles"** (I Corinthians 15:7) or any of His brethren came to believe in JESUS. But although not an apostle in the more specialized and technical sense, James, as we gather from numerous references to him in the Book of Acts and in the epistles, was head of the mother church at Jerusalem, and in that position of leadership wielded a wide and commanding influence. Tradition reports that he was held in high repute by Christian and non-Christian Jews alike, that his knees became hard as camel's hoofs from long hours of intercessory prayer, and that he finally suffered a martyr's death.

"Now the things which I write unto you, beloved, before God, I lie not" (Galatians 1:20). The apostle calls upon GOD to witness to the truthfulness of what he is writing. He is not swerved from conviction as to his divine commission by any or all of the attempts of the Judaizers to discredit him. And the true servant of JESUS CHRIST must allow no opposition whatsoever to make him lower his flags of spiritual authority as an ambassador of CHRIST. What really matters is not what men say we are, but what GOD knows we are.

"Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me" (Galatians 1:21-24). And well might Paul's change from persecutor to a flaming herald of the Cross cause the churches in Judea, that had never seen his face, to glorify GOD in him. We too are to **"let our lights so shine before men that they may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven"** (Matthew 5:16). We are to be floodlights for the LORD - and floodlights call attention but to the object they illuminate, be it a picture, a statue, or a building. Whatever causes men to glorify GOD is worth all its costs in hardship, danger and sacrifice.

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