

ENTRUSTED WITH THE GOSPEL

Galatians 1:6-17

Prior to the writing of this epistle Paul had established churches in Galatia. In keeping with his usual custom elsewhere, Paul gave the members of these churches numerous instructions which they needed. He also conveyed to them the decision of the Council at Jerusalem, the gist of which was that it was not necessary for the Gentile Christians to observe the ceremonial laws of the Jews. After Paul departed from their midst in order to minister in other places, certain Jews, who had become professing Christians but had remained loyal to the churches and taught their members that Gentile believers had to submit to the rite of circumcision in order to become Christians and be saved. These Judaizers resented Paul's teaching that salvation was by grace through faith plus nothing, or entirely apart from the works required by the law. Consequently they did everything within their power to discredit Paul in the eyes of those whom he had introduced to Christ and instructed in the will and way of the Lord. They argued that Paul was not a true apostle. Furthermore, they accused him of preaching one thing in some places and another in other places for the sole purpose of pleasing men sufficiently to win them as his followers. Moreover, they charged that Paul's doctrines would encourage unbecoming conduct on the part of his hearers.

Paul was surprised at and astonished by what was happening in the case of many of the Galatians whom he had led to make a public profession of their faith in Christ during his ministry in their midst. With satisfaction he recalled how they had readily and eagerly responded to the gospel which he had preached to them. Naturally he was shocked and grieved that so many of them, whom he had influenced to receive Christ and thereby obtain forgiveness of sin and salvation, had exemplified such an amazing instability by deserting the glorious gospel of the blessed God and turning to the erroneous teachings of the Judaizers which could not meet their needs or those of others.

To the Galatians Paul had preached salvation by grace through faith in Christ, just as he did to all others whom he addressed, but, ere long after his departure from their midst, false teachers had come along insisting that all Christians must keep the old Jewish law also if they were to be saved. Unfortunately there were those who were so unstable that they were in the process of succumbing to these subtle and false teachings of these Judaizers who were doing their utmost to undermine the influence of the Apostle. Therefore, he set himself to the task of halting this perilous drift which was so obvious to all. Paul was determined to gainsay the heresies that were jeopardizing the faith of his beloved converts as quickly and bluntly as possible. Anything that would imperil the doctrine of salvation by grace would quickly encounter his outspoken and uncompromising opposition.

The gospel is good news. However, it should be clear to anybody who can read the New Testament that it is not good news to tell any man that he must save himself by his own works. To tell one that he must work in order to obtain eternal life is neither good news nor good advice. The doctrine of salvation by works has been the basic contention of all of the pagan religions through the centuries. Knowing that good works are always the fruits of salvation and never the roots of it. Paul always insisted that salvation from sin is only and always through the work of Christ for us and the work of the Holy Spirit in us, and never through any merits or works of our own. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are

his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:8-10). To Paul there was one gospel only, and for anyone to preach something contrary to this divinely revealed good news was to invite the divine wrath. Nobody has any right to alter God's message to the hearts of men.

Quite frequently we hear the contention that the gospel of Christ as proclaimed by Paul, and as preached and believed by countless multitudes since his day, is not relevant to our day. Those having this attitude argue that, for this reason, it should be modified and changed. Many are striving diligently to pervert the gospel in spite of the fact that Paul reminded every reader of this epistle of the finality of the gospel of Christ. He admonished all of his readers to refuse to give heed to those who come to them with any message which is contrary to the gospel of Christ which is recorded in the Word of God and which he firmly believed and faithfully proclaimed. In the event that he, for any reason, should bring them any other message than that which he had previously delivered to them, Paul urged them to refuse to believe what even he might say. He was convinced that no possible combination of circumstances could invalidate the gospel which he had preached to them.

How is Paul's insistence upon the finality of the gospel of Christ to be explained? He said, "But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul was only delivering the message which he had received from the Lord. That message was stated very succinctly by him in I Corinthians 15:3-4: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures." We, too, have the glorious privilege of proclaiming the divine revelation which has been recorded in the Holy Scriptures. God's Word contains His eternal message of redemption and it is relevant to every generation.

In verse ten the question was raised as to Paul's motive in preaching the gospel--as to whether he was seeking the approval and favor of men or striving to please God. His critics, the Judaizers, were seeking to exalt and glorify themselves. Through their strenuous efforts to amalgamate law and grace they were striving to win the approval of their hearers. They did not seem to realize that the most important thing was not what men preferred and wanted, but rather what produced the right results. That which wins the approval of men does not necessarily work. God knows exactly what men need and has made ample provision for their needs. Remember, however, that the superficial desires and deepest needs of men are not necessarily the same; in fact, very frequently they are entirely different. The only gospel which produces saved souls and transformed lives is the gospel of Christ, which Paul preached so faithfully and effectively, as have many others.

In his defense of the supremacy of the gospel of Christ over the false teachings of his critical opponents, Paul went somewhat into detail regarding his personal experience of salvation on the road to Damascus, his realization of his call from Christ to become a minister of the gospel, his reception of the direct revelation from the Lord, his lack of direction from the other apostles and his personal withdrawal into Arabia for an extended period of prayer, study, communion with and instruction from God. From then until the end of his life Paul was ever grateful that the Lord had saved him and entrusted him with the glorious gospel of Christ, and to the great task of proclaiming it to all who would listen he gave himself unstintingly. Let us see to it that we are faithful in our stewardship.