THE BOOK OF GALATIANS

"Paul, God's Unusual Servant"

Galatians 1:15-24

Preview

1. Make no mistake about it--Paul is an apostle through God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ (v. 1). This is a true divine appointment. No apostles today!

2. The Gospel which Paul preached involved the death of Christ, deliverance from this age, and all in concert with the will of God (v. 4). Such gives God alone the glory (v. 5).

3. To deviate from Paul's message is to fail to teach the Gospel of Christ (vv. 6-9). Whoever and whatever to the contrary, there is only one Gospel of God's infinite grace. That is what Paul preached.

4. Although Paul was reared and educated in a works system of belief (Judaism), the Gospel he preached was altogether different. It came to him by a revelation of Jesus Christ (vv. 10-14). On this matter, Paul extrapolates. How did this occur? These ways:

1. He was SEPARATED v. 15

This separation is sourced in the divine good pleasure, hence a divine intervention. The aorist tense of the verb "separated" denotes a once-for-all action of God. Moreover, the verb "separate" is also the root for "Pharisee." So what Paul was by birth and connection formerly, he is now to a different object before he was born at all. Surely the phrase "from my mother's womb" marks Paul off according to God's purpose independent of Paul's character or actions. Hence, before Paul had impulses of his own, God's grace reached him (cf. Jer. 1:5).

2. He was CALLED v. 15

Whereas the separation was an eternal matter, the call expressed here was in time. The aorist is an expression of a once-for-all action. The cross reference to Romans 8:30 is patent. God's eternal decision is brought into time. Wonder of wonders--God's grace! That's exactly what it is--grace. The text states it clearly. It is correct to say that God's good pleasure is the moving cause of the call; the mediating cause of the call is God's grace. Finally, God's heaven-sent voice is the instrumental cause of the call. Everything is divine. This is the only way God brings people to Himself!

3. He was EXPOSED v. 16

Again the aorist tense of "reveal" is employed to indicate a once-for-all action. This revelation should be considered as both subjective and objective. In a real sense the Lord was made known (unveiled in Paul) to the apostle. But in addition, the Lord Himself appeared to Paul "in my case," i.e. objectively. This is not gained from Acts 9, 22, 26 which record Paul's personal testimony, but other references do affirm this (cf. Acts 9:17; 22:14; 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8). The verb "revealed" when used of the Lord Jesus in the only other N.T. reference notes a real external in person appearance (Luke 17:30). If this is correct, Paul "saw" the Lord!

4. He was COMMISSIONED v. 16

The purpose for Paul's revelation is that he might preach the Gospel (so Greek) among the nations (Gentiles). The change in tense is very meaningful. It is present and therefore continuous. Paul's life-long appointment is the Gospel (Acts 22:14, 15). There is nothing short term about this man! It is evident Paul knew the commission (Gal. 2:8, 9). Consider his involvement in Gentile evangelism and the resultant problems (Acts 13-15).

5. He was PREPARED vv. 17-20

The underpinning of these verses is simple; Paul was in no position after his conversion to get the message he preached from men (v. 16c) nor from Jerusalem (v. 17a). He was in the desert of Arabia and in the city of Damascus (v. 17 b, c) and then went to become acquainted with Cephas (Peter) with whom he stayed a short while (v. 18). Incidentally, he saw James the Lord's brother (v. 19). The strong confirmatory observation of the truth (v. 20) makes it sure that his contacts after conversion would never account for the Gospel he preached. Those who impugned Paul's apostleship and message were not truthful to the facts of the case. Grace and grace alone saves the sinner. Any iota of works or system of works is deceit, troublesome, and a perversion of the Truth. So be it!

NOTE: "James, the Lord's brother" (v. 19) has caused the Roman Catholics no end of trouble and confusion. The Hieronymian theory, since Jerome, suggests that "brother" means "cousin." The Epiphanian theory, which like the previous one preserves the "perpetual virginity" of Mary idea, suggests that "brother" concerns sons of Joseph by a former marriage. The true view is the Helvidian which avoids all circumlocutions and takes the words in their natural normal sense. The mention of our Lord distinguishes James from the son of Zebedee and the son of Alphaeus. He is the James who wrote the Book by his name.

6. He was CONFIRMED vv. 21-24

The places mentioned (v. 21) are far from Jerusalem and therefore contact with the Apostles. Paul could not have received instruction from that quarter. All came from God! However, the church incorporated into Jesus Christ, the Head, heard about Paul, the former persecutor. He preached the faith which he previously destroyed. Consequently, they kept glorifying (imperfect tense) God in him i.e. God was working in him!

AFTERVIEW

A man's message is only what his life is able to support. Paul's life is clearly a demonstration of the work of God, not the work of man. His message of salvation by grace through faith, apart from works, is true and worthy of total confidence. Have you so believed?