

Introduction

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO PAUL

The apostle Paul holds a special place in the history of the church. He was perhaps the most ardent enemy the church had before his salvation, but afterwards he was one of its foremost proponents. He preached the gospel to both the Jews and to the Gentiles. He established churches throughout the Mediterranean world. He nurtured those churches with his personal ministry and with the thirteen epistles of the New Testament, which the Spirit of God caused him to write. It is not at all strange, then, that Paul referred to the gospel, on at least two occasions in the New Testament, as *my gospel*.

Paul's personal commitment to the gospel led him to not only preach the gospel, but to defend it against all who would corrupt its precepts. In fact Paul took any attack upon the truth of the gospel as a personal attack. When the Judaizers (legalistic Jews from the sect of the Pharisees, who claimed to be Christians) preached *another gospel* to the churches of Galatia, Paul aggressively defended the gospel against their unscriptural views and staunchly rejected their claims: that ritual (circumcision) and the observance of the law of Moses were essential elements

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

to the salvation of the Gentiles. This defense has been on going from the earliest days of the church until now. In fact this defense against ritual and law for salvation is found as a sub-topic underlying the primary theme in most of Paul's epistles. Our understanding of this defense provides us with essential information for the proper understanding of Paul's epistles, and it reveals the elements which make up the *other gospel* of the Judaizers. These concepts were born in man's knowledge of good and evil and are found in all of the religions and social mores of man from the fall of Adam until now. Thus Solomon wrote, *There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death* (Proverbs 14:12).

The *way that seemeth right unto a man* arose from the deception of Eve and the fall of Adam in the garden of Eden. Eve was deceived into believing she could become a god through the knowledge of good and evil -- essential elements of the evil tree that bore that name. So, in every sense of the word, the Devil's lie, presented in the tree of *the knowledge of good and evil*, was *another gospel*, just as the truth, presented in *the tree of life*, reveals the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ that would be fulfilled on the cross (tree) of Calvary. Thus the *other gospel, that seemeth right unto a man*, promised life and produced death, whereas, the tree of life promised life and provides life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The purpose of this book is to magnify the truth of the gospel of the saving grace of God and to stand against the insidious lie of the Devil, which has *blinded the minds of them that believe not*. Many have been led to believe that the primary enemies of the truth of the gospel are found in the irreligious of this world. Yet, for the most part, the irreligious world is indifferent and could care less about these things, even though, they, like the religious world, have been deceived

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

by the lie of the Devil. However it is the religious world, both inside and outside of the canopy of Christianity, that is actively engaged in the propagation of *another gospel*. This was the case in Galatia with the Judaizers who came there from Jerusalem, falsely claiming authority for their corrupted doctrines from the church in Jerusalem.

These Judaizers and their modern-day counterparts have led the church into the era of *the great apostasy*. Interestingly, the apostasy flourishes in an environment of religious fervor and religious activities that are often called *revival*, where so-called *evangelists* preach in the flesh, to the flesh, endeavoring to perfect the flesh for an offering to God. Like king Saul of old, when commanded of God to utterly destroy the Amalekites (who represent the flesh) and all that they possessed, saved the best alive (of what God had condemned) to make an offering unto God. So our churches, in the name of *the unity of the Spirit*, cast aside the fundamentals of the faith to build a great work for God, saying, *Together we can* (a unity for unity's sake phrase of the modern ecumenical movement spoken weekly in many churches).

On the one hand we despise the error which is proclaimed by churches that once preached the truth, but on the other hand, the fact of the apostasy encourages us. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, informing them that *the great apostasy* was one of two events which would signal the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ to this earth to establish His kingdom.

This book and our preaching are directed towards strengthening believers in the midst of *the great apostasy*. This, we hope, will be accomplished by sound expositional preaching in our churches and in this book, through a sound exposition of the book of Galatians and its historical connection with the book of Acts. This exposition will supply us with the fundamentals of the

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

gospel and the information necessary to recognize and to refute the many errors we are confronted with day by day.

When Paul referred to the gospel as *my gospel*, this was not presumptuousness, nor was it a statement suggesting that the gospel originated with Paul. It was simply Paul's way of saying that the gospel which was revealed to him, by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ, was his to preach and to uphold. Further, Paul's understanding of the gospel has unlocked the mysteries of the Old Testament Scriptures for many in Paul's day and in ours. To the Corinthians Paul wrote:

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I have preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I have preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. 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. (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

This declaration reveals at least four things. First, it reveals Paul preached a gospel which he had received. From this and other Scripture, we know he received it by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ. Second, the gospel Paul received and preached was identical to the gospel that was contained in the Old Testament Scriptures. Third, the gospel was ... *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 Scriptures*. Fourth, the Christ who died for our sins must be the Christ of the Scriptures. Thus He must be the eternal God. He must be the Creator of heaven and earth. He must be of the seed of David according to the flesh. He must, in the fulness of time, enter the stream of humanity through the virgin birth, so that He is both God and man: the one mediator between God and man. He must in His life as a man fulfill every jot and tittle of the law, as well as all righteousness. He must be totally without sin, and He must willingly offer Himself

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

as the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. He must die by crucifixion at the hands of both the Jews and the Gentiles. He must die with malefactors and be buried in a rich man's tomb. He must rise from the dead after three days and three nights as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for that period of time. He must provide eternal life to those called and given to Him of God and present them faultless before the Father. These, as well as many other truths, must be true of the Christ who died for our sins according to the Scriptures. He must fulfill all that was written of Him.

This declaration of the gospel, coupled with the statement of the Lord Jesus Christ: *I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me*, reveals that salvation is attainable only by faith in the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ. It is not attained, nor is it maintained, *by works of righteousness which we have done*. Clearly then, salvation is of the Lord.

The Scriptures reveal that God is omniscient. This means that everything that can be known, is known, or ever shall be known, has always been known to God without regard to time. The Scriptures testify that *Salvation is of the Lord*. These things enable us to know that the gospel (by the very nature of God) has been known to God from all eternity.

This is difficult for the finite mind to understand. Nevertheless it is the truth of the Scriptures. When the Bible says that Christ was *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*, and that God *hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world*, this should not seem strange to us. These are the statements of an omniscient God. By such statements God reveals that through His elective purpose and foreknowledge the gospel was in place before man was created: before man, by transgression, fell.

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

Therefore the omniscience of God requires the gospel to be a gospel of grace. This is true because, by definition, the grace of God is God's unmerited favor towards man. God's foreknowledge of man's failures and faults negates any consideration of merit in salvation. Further it negates the performance of rituals and laws as necessities for salvation. Not only that, it requires the gospel to have its roots in God's love and mercy.

It is not surprising, then, that the Scriptures attest to these truths. They show God's provision for man's salvation before man was created. They show there has never been a time when man has been without the resources of God's mercy and grace. When Adam and Eve sinned, God immediately revealed the gospel to them in His judgment of the serpent. Thus God said to the serpent: *I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel* (Genesis 3:15).

This statement regarding the judgment of the serpent reveals the truth of the gospel in its mystery form. God promised that through the bruising of the woman's seed (Jesus Christ) judgment would come upon the Devil and his seed. This judgment would provide the basis for the redemption of man. After God spoke these words, Adam responded to God's promise by naming his wife *Eve: the mother of all living*. Then, through a mysterious act and a further revelation of the terms of the gospel, God revealed that the bruising of the woman's seed would be a vicarious atonement. This was done when He clothed Adam and Eve with the skin of a sacrificial victim. This sacrifice revealed that their self-efforts to cover their sins (by clothing themselves with fig leaves) was not acceptable to God. God's provision of an acceptable covering was a portrayal of the truth of the gospel: how man would be made fit for God's presence by the

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

vicarious sacrifice and imputed righteousness of Christ.

This was the manner in which the gospel was first presented. Admittedly, it was not presented with all of the theological details that would be provided in the Old and New Testament Scriptures, but it was presented with enough clarity for Adam and Eve to believe the gospel and be saved. After the fulfillment of the gospel by Jesus Christ, the apostle Paul wrote of its clear presentation in the church age:

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)

When Paul spoke of the gospel as having been kept secret, he spoke of the fact that the gospel had been given in mystery form. So that, without the key to unlock the mystery, it was indeed hidden from view. Consequently, throughout the Old Testament Scriptures, the gospel was portrayed in shadows, types, allegories, parables and prophetic promises until the time of its historical fulfillment and direct revelation in and by Jesus Christ.

At the present time, through salvation in Jesus Christ and the ministry of the man of God with the Word of God, these mysteries are being made known unto us. Even with the revelation given to us by the ministry of the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit, an element of mystery still remains. We know there are many truths in the Word of God that are still veiled to us in their mystery forms of *parables, shadows and types*. This is one reason why the man of God is to *Study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

The mysteries of God confound the scholars. By scholars, we do not mean genuine Christian scholarship (i.e., men led and taught of the Holy Spirit), but rather the scholarship of the world's system which presumes to speak with authority in spiritual matters. The scholars tell us there was an evolution of the gospel in the early church until it reached its final state of being the gospel of grace that Paul called, *my gospel*.

The scholars operate in an academic world of human reason. They seek to provide a human solution and natural explanation for virtually everything contained in the Scriptures, such as the creation of man, the flood, the crossing of the Red Sea, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and so forth. They certainly do not believe in the plenary inspiration of Scripture, nor do they understand the parabolic expression of truth. The so-called scholars equate with the Jews of whom Jesus said:

... in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross [stupid], and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at anytime they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. (Matthew 13:14-15)

Consequently these unregenerate scholars have a natural explanation for almost everything and understand nothing. The expression of truth with typology is totally foreign to them. The mysteries of God cannot be understood by them because they are unregenerate and do not possess the Spirit of God (I Corinthians 2:14). Thus the concept of an evolution of the gospel was born in their natural minds and is totally without foundation in the Scriptures.

There was not, nor could there be, an evolution of the gospel in the mind of God or in the minds of the men called of God. These theories prove to be false by the very nature of God.

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

There is only one true gospel. It is the gospel that was preached unto the fathers in its mystery form of shadows and types, and it is the gospel that has been preached unto us by the direct revelation of the Spirit of God through the clear preaching and teaching of the Word of God. It is Paul's gospel.

Consequently the gospel Paul preached was his by right of his present-tense conviction in the promises of God as revealed in the Word of God. When Paul confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, he did so in the New Testament Greek meaning of the word *homologeō* which is translated *confess*. This word is a compound word with two parts: *homo* which means *same* and *logeō* (verb form of *logos*) which means *to say*. Thus it means to say the same thing, or to be in agreement with another. Paul agreed with God about Jesus Christ in His Person and in His work as revealed in the Scriptures.

The gospel Paul preached was the gospel that had been committed to him by the Lord. These truths were expanded to Paul in Arabia by the direct revelation of the Lord. Consequently the gospel Paul preached was his gospel, just as the gospel I preach is my gospel; and both Paul's gospel and my gospel are the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ revealed in the Scriptures.

The purpose of this book, as we have stated, is to encourage believers with the truth of the gospel. Consequently we will consider Paul's gospel and trace Paul's involvement with his gospel from the time of his salvation to the time of the council at Jerusalem. Paul's letter to the Galatians spans this period of time and thoroughly covers the subject of Paul's gospel. Thus a commentary on the book of Galatians and a consideration of the history of that period of time is ideally suited to our purpose.

Introduction to the Gospel According to Paul

Concerning the structure of this book, a few comments will be helpful: Chapter one, *Saul Who Was Also Called Paul*, introduces us to Saul of Tarsus, who, when converted, became the apostle Paul. This chapter gives us the historical links between events in the book of Acts and the book of Galatians. Chapter two, *Paul an Apostle Not of Men*, starts with Galatians chapter one and verse one. This chapter begins the direct commentary on the book of Galatians.

We have chosen to use a running commentary in narrative form, rather than a verse-by-verse exegesis, to give us a greater feeling for Paul and his ministry. Because we have chosen this form for our commentary, we have placed the portion of Scripture under discussion in italics at the beginning of each chapter. This will help the reader to maintain the context of the commentary. These Scriptural links begin with chapter two, where the direct commentary on Galatians begins.

Finally, we pray the Holy Spirit of God will quicken the understanding of each one who reads *The Gospel According to Paul* and bless the truths revealed to the hearts of each reader, so that, together, we might *Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*. A growth in grace is essential to, and will always produce, a greater understanding of the Word of God. This is essential to our walk, because *the just are to live by faith... And faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God*.

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