

Galatians 1: Paul's Defence of his Apostleship and of the Gospel

1. Initial Greetings: 'Paul an apostle (1:1)

Paul embarks immediately upon a description of his own apostolic status and its origin: 'neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father' (1:1). This reflects a challenge to Paul's claim by Jewish Christian missionaries who state that his apostleship is derived solely from his contact with other prominent Christians.

2. Paul's Understanding of Apostleship

2.1 Definition of 'Apostle'

- a) 'One sent /commissioned' (from the Greek verb *apostellō*) to establish churches (cf. II Cor. 8:23)
- b) Those called or commissioned by the earthly Jesus, i.e., his disciples (cf. the use of term in Acts 1:2, 26; 2:37, 42-43)

2.2 Accusations brought against Paul's claim to Apostleship

- a) Rebuttal of Paul's mission to the Gentiles
- b) Paul had not received a direct commission from the earthly Jesus

2.3 Paul's Response to such Accusations: Damascus Road Experience (1:1, 11-12)

Paul had received a direct commission from the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (see also vv. 11-12), which he viewed as worthy a revelation as the one experienced by Jesus' own disciples.

3. The Divine Nature of Paul's Calling (1:1, 15)

Emphasis is placed on the dramatic transformation of Paul from persecutor to Church leader (cf. 1:23). Note how Paul describes his earlier life as a Jew, a life characterized by zeal for Jewish righteousness (1:13-14). God called Paul from birth (1:15), echoing the call of the prophets of old (Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5).

4. Paul's Independence of the Jerusalem Church (1:16-17, 18-24; 2:1)

'I did not confer with any human being' (1:16); Paul went to Arabia for three years after his conversion (1:16-17). Afterwards he went to Jerusalem to meet Peter briefly (1:18-19). Fourteen years elapsed before his next visit (2:1), with no interim contact between him and the Jerusalem leaders.

5. The Seal of Approval by the Jerusalem Apostles (2:2-10)

Paul received recognition during his second visit to Jerusalem after his conversion (2:1-10). The 'pillar apostles' acknowledged the validity of the gospel preached by Paul: 'he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the

circumcised worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles' (2:8). They gave Paul 'the right hand of fellowship' (2:9).

6. The Incident at Antioch (2:11-14)

Paul draws attention to Peter's hypocritical act of withdrawing from eating with Gentile Christians when representatives from James arrived in Antioch (2:12-13). Paul publicly opposes Peter as an indirect assertion of his apostolic authority (2:11, 14).

7. Paul's Defence of the Gospel

Paul's primary intention is to defend the validity of his interpretation of the Gospel rather than his own personal status. The divine origin of the gospel and his commission to preach to the Gentiles are emphasized. Paul teaches 'a gospel of grace'. In other words, salvation is universal on the condition of faith in Jesus.

Reading List

J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990 2nd edition).

J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Anchor, 1997).

J. Munck, *Paul and the Salvation of Mankind* (London: SCM, 1959).