

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS - PART 1

Paul's letter to the Galatians is by far the most urgent and passionate letter he ever wrote. People among whom he had spent a great deal of time and for whom he had suffered much were in deep trouble. When Paul was first with them, (Acts 13 & 14) his troubles had been in the form of rocks and rejection. Now something much worse had happened to them. They were being misled by false teaching. Their troubles were in the form of rules and religion.

Galatia was in the centre of modern Turkey and had been partly evangelised by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Their preaching in the four cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe had produced both enthusiastic believers and violent opponents of the gospel. Paul and Barnabas revisited them all soon afterwards, (Acts 14:21), and Paul returned with others in Acts 15:41; and 18:23. It seems likely that Paul wrote this letter soon after the meeting in Jerusalem in Acts 15 to which he referred in Gal.2:1.

Timothy, who became one of Paul's closest helpers, and whom Paul came to regard as a son, was from Lystra. (Acts 16:1) Because he had invested so much time among the Galatians, and in turn learned so much about being a missionary while working in Galatia, Paul felt he had been a mother in labour to the whole area. (Gal.4:19) Like a parent, he cared deeply when his spiritual children were in trouble.

Read the whole book straight through several times, asking God to give you an overall sense of what Galatians is about. Before studying each chapter in detail, divide it into its obvious sections and give each section a title to express its main idea. My suggestion is that we divide chapter one as follows:- verses 1,2; 3-5; 6-10; 11-17; 18-24. Try to see the sequence of ideas from one section to the next. Finally look for a title for the chapter as a whole. It will help to remind you in future of the key thoughts in this chapter.

Section 1 – (1:1,2)

Q.1 Paul often describes himself at the beginning of his letters as 'an apostle', a specially sent one, but this time he goes to much greater lengths to emphasise who sent him. Why in the light of verses 6-17 does he do this? In what way do we need, but often lack, this same confidence about the direction of our lives?

Q.2 Of what 3 aspects of the relationship between Jesus and His Father does Paul remind us here? Why is each one important in knowing who is directing our lives?

Q.3 Paul usually linked others with him in the writing of his letters. On this occasion they are unnamed. Does being sent by God mean we do not need human support?

Section 2 - (1:3-5)

Q.4 Grace is a totally undeserved gift, and peace is the end of a war. How does verse 4 explain this double greeting?

Q.5 What is God's will for our lives? Why is it always important to keep this in mind when we are thinking about God's directions for us?

Section 3 – (1:6-10)

Q.6 Having established that it is only the Lord who makes us messengers, Paul moves on to the question of where our message comes from. He claims that there is only one gospel. What is its source? What is its content? What motivates those who preach it? How therefore can we recognise false gospels? What motivates those who preach other messages? Why is it so important to know the difference? What modern examples of false gospels are there?

Section 4 – (1:11-17)

Q.7 The only gospel is the one that comes from God. Any other message is false and damaging to the hearer and to the one who preaches it. We must be sure that the gospel we hear or the one we preach is the true gospel. How can we be sure?

Q.8 Paul now begins to give his testimony. How was the gospel revealed to him? What was he like beforehand? What was he like afterwards? What does Paul mean by 'reveal His Son in me'? How does the record of his conversion show that the gospel he had received was the true one? How can we apply the same test today?

Q.9 How according to verse 15 does God bring people to know Him? What purpose did God have for Paul once He had brought him to Himself? How did He prepare him for this purpose? How do you imagine this would have happened in practice? Why didn't Paul just go to the apostles and learn Christian doctrine from them? Does Paul's experience have anything to do with us?

Q.10 What happened when Paul returned to Damascus?(Acts 9:23-25) What would have been the difference in his teaching between his first and second visits? Is it not dangerous to go away on our own to read the Bible and then come back and preach it without checking commentaries first to make sure we are right?

Section 5 – (1:18-24)

Q.11 Eventually Paul did make contact with other Christian leaders. This would appear to be the visit Luke describes in Acts 9:26-30. What problem had to be overcome to make this visit successful? How does the same problem hinder the growth of new Christians these days? How can it be overcome? What did Cephas (Peter) and James add to Paul's understanding of the gospel? How would their information complement what Paul had learned alone in Arabia with his Old Testament and the Holy Spirit?

Q.12 The description 'James the Lord's brother' confirms the identity of the James referred to in Acts 15:13 and 21:18 who is also the writer of the Epistle of James. Remember that James, the brother of John, one of the original 12 apostles had been executed in Acts 12:2. Matthew 13:55 tells us the names of Jesus' 4 half-brothers. What would be the unique contribution of Cephas?

Q.13 Galatians 1:21 corresponds to Acts 9:30. Tarsus is in Cilicia. What purpose do you suppose God had in causing Paul to spend the next 10-12 years back home? Was it not a waste of a good missionary?

Q.14 How did Paul's reputation in the church of Judea illustrate the one true gospel?