

# Paul's Authority (Power) and Gospel



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 1

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 2 Peter 3:15, 16; Galatians 1; Philippians 1:1; Galatians 5:12.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Am I now trying to get people to think well of me? Or do I want God to think well of me? Am I trying to please people? If I were, I would not be serving Christ” (Galatians 1:10, NIV).

**STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY BUILT A CENTER ON THEIR CAMPUS WHERE EVERYONE WOULD BE WELCOME.** It did not matter whether people were black or white, male or female, rich or poor, or what religion they were. Imagine if, years later, these students returned to the campus only to discover that other students had changed the center. Gone was the large room with plenty of space for peaceful socializing. Instead, the room had been subdivided (divided again) into many smaller rooms for many kinds of groups. The students responsible for the change might have argued that their authority to make these changes came from an old practice that had been in place for many years.

This is almost the same situation that Paul faced when he wrote his letter to the churches in Galatia. Paul's plan was that Gentiles (non-Jews) could join the church on the basis of faith alone. But he was being challenged by false teachers who said that Gentiles must also be circumcised<sup>1</sup> before they could become members.

This position, Paul saw, was an attack on the basic message of the gospel itself. So, he had to act. The result was the letter to the Galatians.

1. circumcised—having the skin (called the foreskin) cut off at the end of the penis of a man or boy.

**SUNDAY—OCTOBER 2****PAUL, THE LETTER WRITER  
(2 Peter 3:15, 16)**

**What does 2 Peter 3:15, 16 tell us that the early church thought about Paul's writing? What do these verses teach us about how inspiration<sup>2</sup> works?**

When Paul wrote to the Galatians, he was not trying to write a prize-winning book. Instead, under the leading of the Holy Spirit, Paul was discussing certain issues that involved him and the believers in Galatia.

Letters like Galatians played an important part in Paul's work as an apostle.<sup>3</sup> As the missionary to the Gentile (non-Jewish) world, Paul founded many churches scattered around the Mediterranean. Paul visited these churches whenever he could. But he could not stay in one place too long. Instead, Paul wrote letters to the churches to give them guidance. Over time, copies of Paul's letters were shared with other churches (Colossians 4:16). Sadly, some of Paul's letters have been lost. But, at least 13 books in the New Testament carry his name. The above words from Peter show that, at some point, Paul's letters were thought of as holy writings. This shows just how much power Paul's ministry (work done for God) had in the history of the church.



**Paul wrote letters to the churches to give them guidance.**

At one time some Christians believed that the style of Paul's letters was special, created by the Spirit in order to contain (hold) God's inspired<sup>4</sup> Word (the Bible). This opinion changed when two young scholars (thinkers) from Oxford, Bernard Grenfell and Arthur Hunt, discovered about five hundred thousand fragments (pieces) of ancient scrolls in Egypt. (The scrolls were written on papyrus.<sup>5</sup> Papyrus was a popular writing material used several hundred years before and after Christ.) In addition to finding some of the oldest copies of the New Testament, Hunt and Grenfell found invoices (bills), tax returns, receipts, and personal letters.

Much to everyone's surprise, the basic style of Paul's letters turned out to be common to all letter writers in his day. The style included (1) an opening

2. inspiration—the process in which Bible writers were influenced (led) by the Holy Spirit.

3. apostle—a disciple (follower) of Jesus who preached and taught the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

4. inspired—given and influenced or guided by the Holy Spirit.

5. papyrus—a tall plant that is like grass and grows in marshes, especially in Egypt; paper made from papyrus that was used in Bible times.

salutation (hello) that mentioned the sender and the receiver, and included a greeting; (2) a word of thanksgiving; (3) the main body of the letter; and, finally, (4) a closing remark.

In short, Paul was following the basic style of his time. He was speaking to his fellow believers through a style that they would know.

**If the Bible were written today, what style do you think the Lord would use to reach us now?**

### MONDAY—OCTOBER 3

#### PAUL'S CALLING (SPECIAL WORK) (Galatians 1:1, 2)

Paul's letters usually follow the basic style of letters written during Bible times. But Galatians holds a number of special features not found in Paul's other letters. When recognized (accepted as true), these differences can help us better understand the situation Paul was discussing.

**Compare<sup>6</sup> Paul's opening salutation (greeting) in Galatians 1:1, 2 with what he writes in Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; and 2 Thessalonians 1:1. In what ways is Paul's salutation in Galatians the same as the other greetings? How is it different?**

Paul's opening salutation in Galatians is a bit longer than in his other letters. But he tries hard to describe the reason for his authority as an apostle. The word *apostle*

means "someone who is sent" or "a messenger." In the New Testament, it speaks of the original 12 followers of Jesus and the others whom the risen Christ appeared to and commanded to be His witnesses (Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 15:7). Paul declares that he belongs to this special group.

Paul strongly denies that his power as an apostle rests on any one person. This suggests that there were some in Galatia who were trying to destroy Paul's authority as an apostle. Why? Some people in the church were not happy with Paul's message that salvation was based on faith in Christ alone and not on works of the law. They felt that Paul's gospel was a rebellion (uprising) against obedience. These troublemakers were clever. They knew that the foundation of Paul's gospel message was directly tied to his authority as an apostle (John 3:34). So they decided to make a powerful attack against that authority.

But Paul's enemies did not directly deny Paul's apostleship.<sup>7</sup> They just argued that it was not really all that important. They claimed that Paul was not one of Jesus' original followers. So, his authority was not from God but from humans. These enemies of Paul argued that perhaps Paul's authority came from the church leaders from Antioch who chose Paul and Barnabas to be missionaries (Acts 13:1–3). Or perhaps it came only from Ananias, who baptized Paul in the first place (Acts 9:10–18). In the opinion of his enemies, Paul was just a messenger

6. compare—to show how two or more things are the same or different.

7. apostleship—power and calling to be an apostle.

from Antioch or Damascus—nothing more! As a result, they argued that his message was just his own opinion, not the Word of God.

Paul understood these dangers, so he defended his apostleship.

**In what ways is the authority of the Bible being challenged today in our church? How can we be sure to know what these challenges are? More important, how have they influenced your own thinking about the authority of the Bible?**

## TUESDAY—OCTOBER 4

### PAUL'S GOSPEL (Galatians 1:1–6)

**In addition to defending his apostleship, what else does Paul point to in his opening greeting to the Galatians? Compare Galatians 1:3–5 with Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; and Colossians 1:2.**

One of the special features of Paul's letters is the way he joins the words *grace*<sup>8</sup> and *peace* in the greetings. The joining of these two words is a bit different from the usual greetings in the Greek and Jewish world. For example, a Greek author would write "Greetings" (*chairein*). But Paul writes "Grace," which sounds almost the same as the Greek word (*charis*). To this Paul adds the usual Jewish greeting of "Peace."

The joining of these two words

(*grace* and *peace*) is not just a pleasant greeting. Instead, the words describe Paul's gospel message. (In fact, Paul uses these two words more than any other author in the New Testament.) The grace and peace are not from Paul but from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**What parts of the gospel does Paul include in Galatians 1:1–6?**

Paul has little space in his opening greeting to develop the nature (truth) of the gospel. But he cleverly describes the basic message of the gospel in only a few short verses. What is the central truth of the gospel? According to Paul, it is not our obedience to the law, which is what Paul's enemies were arguing. Instead, the gospel depends fully on what Christ did for us through His death on the cross and His resurrection.<sup>9</sup> Christ's death and resurrection did something that we never could do for ourselves. They broke the power of sin and death. They set Christ's followers free from the power of evil, which holds so many in fear and slavery.

Paul is thinking of the wonderful news of the grace and peace that God created for us in Christ. So he falls into a quick doxology,<sup>10</sup> which appears in Galatians 1:5.

**In about as many words as Paul uses in Galatians 1:1–5, write**

8. grace—God's gift of forgiveness and mercy that He freely gives us to take away our sins.

9. resurrection—return to life from the dead.

10. doxology—a short song of praise to God.

down your understanding of what the gospel is all about. Bring your words to class on Sabbath.



The gospel depends fully on what Christ did for us through His death on the cross and His return to life from the dead.

### WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 5

#### NO OTHER GOSPEL (Galatians 1:6–9)

What normally follows the opening greeting in Paul's letters? How is Galatians different? Compare Galatians 1:6 with Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4; Philippians 1:3; and 1 Thessalonians 1:2.

Paul discusses all kinds of local issues and problems in his letters to the churches. But he still makes it a practice to follow his opening greeting with a word of prayer or thanksgiving to God for the faith of his readers. He even does this in his letters to the Corinthians, who are struggling with

many problems of behavior (compare 1 Corinthians 1:4 and 1 Corinthians 5:1). The problem in Galatia is so upsetting that Paul does not write the usual thanksgiving part of the letter at all. Instead, he gets right to the point.

**What strong words does Paul use that show his concern about what is happening in Galatia? Read Galatians 1:6–9 and Galatians 5:12.**

Paul does not hold back any words in his charge<sup>11</sup> against the Galatians. He blames them for betraying their calling (honor; responsibility) as Christians. In fact, the word *turning* (Galatians 1:6, NKJV) often was used to describe soldiers who had given up their loyalty to their country by deserting the army. Spiritually speaking, Paul is saying that the Galatians are traitors who are turning their backs on God.

How are the Galatians deserting God? By turning to a different gospel. Paul is not saying that there is more than one gospel. But there are some in the church who are teaching that faith in Christ is not enough (Acts 15:1–5). By saying this, they are acting as if there is another gospel. Paul is so upset that he wants anyone who preaches a different gospel to fall under the curse of God! (Galatians 1:8). Paul feels so strongly about this point that he says the same thing twice (verse 9).

**Today, even in our church, some think that experience is more**

11. charge—a claim that someone has done something wrong or illegal or is guilty of a crime or a fault.



important than doctrine (church beliefs). They claim that our experience or our relationship with God is the most important thing. Experience may be important, but so is correct doctrine. What does Paul teach about the importance of having and believing in correct doctrine?



The Galatians who turned their backs on God were like soldiers who deserted the army.

## THURSDAY—OCTOBER 6

### THE REASON FOR PAUL'S GOSPEL (Galatians 1:11–24)

The troublemakers in Galatia were claiming that Paul wrote his gospel because he wanted others to think well of him. Study Galatians 1:6–9 and verses 11–24. What might Paul have done differently in his letter if he were just trying to get people to think well of him?

Paul did not require Gentile converts (new believers) to be circumcised. Why? Paul's enemies claimed it was because Paul wanted to win believers at any cost. Maybe they thought that Paul did not require circumcision because Gentiles would not want to have it done. They thought he was a people-pleaser! Paul answers his enemies by using the strong words he had just written in verses 8 and 9. If he wanted people to like him, he would surely have answered differently.

**Why does Paul say it is impossible to be a follower of Christ while trying to please people?**

**Paul says in verses 11 and 12 that he received his gospel directly from God. So, how do his words in verses 13–24 make his point?**

Verses 13–24 give a life story about Paul before his conversion<sup>12</sup> (verses 13, 14), at his conversion (verses 15, 16), and afterward (verses 16–24). Paul claims that his experience in each of these events makes it impossible for anyone to claim that he did not receive his gospel from God. Paul is not going to sit by and let anyone spoil his message by questioning his calling. He knows what happened to him. He knows what he was called to teach. And he is going to do it, no matter what may happen to him.

**How certain are you of your call to serve Christ? How can you**

12. conversion—the process of obeying and following Jesus after accepting Him as Savior.

know for sure what God has called you to do? At the same time, even if you are sure of your calling, why must you learn to listen to the advice of others?



Paul knew God had called him to preach.

### FRIDAY—OCTOBER 7

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “In almost every church there were some members who were Jews by birth. These believers were the ones Jewish teachers found they could reach. And through them, the teachers gained a foothold in the churches. It was impossible through arguments from the Bible to overthrow the doctrines taught by Paul. So these Jewish teachers used dishonest methods to weaken Paul’s influence and authority. They declared that he had not been a disciple of Jesus and had not received a command from Him. Yet, he had the nerve to teach doctrines opposed [going against] those held by Peter, James, and the other

apostles. . . .

“Paul’s soul was upset by the evils that threatened to destroy these churches. He quickly wrote to the Galatians. He exposed the Jewish teachers’ false theories [ideas], and rebuked [scolded] those who had departed from the faith.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, pages 188, 189.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① In class, read your explanations of what the gospel should be. What can you learn from one another?
- ② In Paul’s greeting to the Galatians, he declares that Jesus died for a special reason. What was that reason? What meaning does that have for us?
- ③ In Galatians 1:14, Paul says he is very supportive of the traditions<sup>13</sup> of his fathers. By “traditions,” Paul probably means both the customs of the Pharisees<sup>14</sup> and the Old Testament itself. What place (if any) is there for traditions in our faith? What warning might Paul’s experience offer about the whole question of tradition?
- ④ Why was Paul so seemingly intolerant (not accepting) of those who believed differently than he did? Read again some of the things he wrote about those who had a different opinion of the gospel. How might someone taking such a strong stand be thought of in our church today?

13. traditions—rules or customs that have been passed on from generation to generation.

14. Pharisees—a religious group among the Jews in Jesus’ day who believed a person must keep God’s law to be saved.