

Gal. 1: 1-5; I Thes 2: 13; Apostolic Identity I. Apostle- Not from Man II. Apostle- Sent from God

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, have you ever gotten a birthday card in the mail- from your mechanic? I have received these kinds of cards before- they are a nice gesture but are they very meaningful? I mean, do we take the birthday card from our mechanic and hang it on our fridge? Do the words of best wishes inside give us great encouragement? Likely not! The author of the card makes all the difference. If we get a card from our parents or our spouse- it is usually more personal and important to us. So the author makes all the difference. In a similar way, the author of this letter to the Galatians begins his message by emphasising his identity. It is not only his connection but his authority that is being defended in these opening words. As we begin our series on the book of Galatians, we will see that this book focusses on the core of the gospel. The theme of this book is knowing the true gospel in contrast to a different or another gospel. It is written to recovering Pharisees. People who are still tempted to trust in the works of the flesh and their own ability. As a book, Galatians was written around 50 AD to the churches in Asia Minor or present day Turkey. The author of this book is clearly revealed in v. 1- Paul. But as our first verses open, we find that the identity and authority of Paul was the very issue under attack! Who was Paul? Why should we listen to him? So Paul defends his own identity and authority as an apostle because the true gospel is on the line. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ appoints Paul as an apostle to speak with divine authority.

I. Apostle- Not from Man

In our first point, we consider the negative assertion that Paul makes in v. 1. He is not an apostle sent from man nor sent through man. Here Paul begins by making it clear exactly where His apostolic authority had not been received from. As a reminder, an apostle was a man who had received special authority to speak on behalf of Jesus as well as heal in the name of Jesus. But Paul was not an apostle by human institution- and his authority does not come from other people. Even though Paul had been commissioned and sent out by the church in Antioch as found in Acts 11; his identity and authority as an apostle was not because of this commissioning. In other words, the church does not have the authority to make a person an apostle. No apostolic succession here! Added to this, the church does not have the authority to make the Word of God

either. His meeting with the other apostle did not add to his message as he states in chapter 2. Nor was Paul an apostle through men- his office had not been received by way of human means. His was not a biological apostleship. He could and would not pass this authority down to his own sons if he were to have them. Apostolic office is not attained because of your family history or because of who your father was. Paul makes the same assertion in 1:12- for I did not receive the gospel from any man nor was I taught it by any man. His office and message are not of human origin! His apostolic authority was received by Jesus Christ. Now the point Paul is making here comes in the context of the Galatian confusion. Remember that these churches were being infiltrated by various super apostles with their own version of the gospel. But they had appointed themselves to this office- and their message was skewed. Being appointed by men- they did not have the same authority as Paul did. Because the NT books of the Bible had not yet been written, this was a very sensitive and vulnerable time for the early church. Just who could speak and whose word was reliable? From whom would the church hear and receive the gospel? If the gospel was built on human tradition and reasoning, it would remain imperfect and open to manipulation. Children, have you ever played the “telephone game?” That is where you pass a message from one person to another- only to find out how that message could be changed and corrupted. But that is not the way in which Paul spoke! The point is this, the gospel proclaimed by Paul and included in this letter specifically is not built on human wisdom. Paul did not just figure this out- He did not learn it from Gamaliel either. It was not spoken on the basis of human authority. This is not man’s gospel as 1:11 puts it. Just as Paul’s identity as an apostle is not human in origin- so the message he proclaimed is not of man’s idea. And we can extend this to apply to our salvation as a whole. Salvation does not come from man nor is salvation of man’s doing! It is not of our work or ability- not of our insight and wisdom. And when it comes to reading the words of Paul, we can be assured that the book of Galatians is not hearsay or the ramblings of a man sent by men! As we read in I Thes. 2- the Word of God is not to be seen as the words of man. The apostleship of Paul is one on equal footing with the other 12. Although born out of season- late to game if you will- he remains the apostle to the Gentiles and the gospel he brings is pure and it must be embraced!

II. Apostle- Sent from God

So if Paul is not an apostle because of men- or sent on man's authority; by what authority does he teach, preach and write? You might remember that the word for "apostle" means someone who is sent. An apostle is like a herald- an official representative of the king sent with an official message. When the herald speaks, he speaks on behalf of someone else the words of someone else. So it is with Paul, he was an apostle sent through Jesus Christ. The calling that Paul received, the apostolic word that he proclaimed, and the office he filled was one he had been appointed to by Jesus. When Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus, Jesus told him to rise and go. Paul was identified as the chosen vessel of Jesus in Acts 9 to carry the gospel to the Gentiles. Not only chosen by but chosen through Jesus. It is through the person and work of Jesus that the gospel comes! Added to this, Paul was chosen and appointed to this office by God the Father. God the Father is the fount and source of every good and perfect gift- it is by the Father that a person is chosen and elect before the foundation of the world. And here, Paul recognises that he was chosen by the Father to be an apostle to the Gentiles. Now in this assertion, Paul is making it clear that when he speaks the gospel, he is speaking on the authority of God! He is acting like a prophet of old who would say- Thus saith the Lord. And particularly when it comes to these letters of Paul- as we have this book of Galatians before us- these books carry the stamp and seal of the Divine Spirit Himself. In other words, the gospel Paul proclaimed was the gospel revealed to him by God. He was not speaking on his own authority, but rather the authority of God. As we read in I Thes. 2- you received the word as it is, the very word of God. This is not to say that every single word Paul ever spoke and every single thing he ever did came with the authority of God. Not at all. But when Paul proclaimed the gospel and when the Spirit inspired him to write this letter, these did carry the authority of God Himself.

Now why is this such an important point that Paul would start his letter by affirming this? Well, remember the context. These Galatian churches were accepting false teachers who were polluting the gospel. They were preaching a false, human centered gospel. A works righteousness of sorts. So Paul is making this clear,

reject the true word of God at your own peril! If you ignore the gospel, you will soon stray into sin! If you neglect the Word of God, you will suffer loss! As Paul accuses them in v. 6- you have quickly deserted the Father who called you in the grace of Christ! You have turned to another gospel- a distorted one! You have chosen works which leave you bankrupt when grace is freely offered! The reason that Paul asserts his authority and the purity of gospel he was proclaiming is because these churches were going astray! They were following other gospels which are not gospel at all! The doctrine of justification was at stake! And this applies to us today. When the good news is proclaimed, God's authority back it up! Not that any preacher today is infallible, but the gospel of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ is! It is that message that must be heard and received! The good news is not the words of some man and the content of the good news is not that we can be saved by the works of men! No; the truth is that salvation is found as revealed in the Word of God and is received by the works of God alone!

Now this truth gives us the ability to be very bold in our speaking and in our living. Your faith is built on the Word of God which carries the authority of God. Although written by men, the Bible is the very Word of God! It's truth is not just some random ideas passed on from person to person. No; we are not at the mercy of someone's fading memory. The apostolic foundation of the church was established through Jesus and God the Father! We have great confidence in this truth! So we receive the written Word of God as it is- the very word of God! Or as II Tim. 3 puts it, all Scripture is God breathed. And again in I Peter, no prophesy was produced by the will of men, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Just as we confess that Jesus was not just a wise teacher but that He is the Word of God. So we also confess that Jesus continues to speak to us through the apostolic witness and writings as we find here in Galatians. As our theme states: Jesus Christ appoints Paul as an apostle to speak with divine authority. There is a danger that we all face- when we listen to the gospel proclaimed- or when we hold God's Word in our hands. That we would treat it like any other book- receiving it like any other message. Free to take or reject what we read and hear. But Paul's warning rings true today- his words are the sound of God's voice so listen to them!