

Sabbath School Lesson #2 – Paul’s Authority and Gospel – 1-7 July 2017

Christ and Him crucified is the Gospel that Paul preached to Galatians, but they were moving from it. “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another Gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the Gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by revelation of Jesus Christ” (Galatians 1:6-12).

Who Calls Men? – “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:9). “The God of all grace, who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus” (1 Peter 5:10). “The promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call” (Acts 2:39). Those men afar off include all that are in the world. God calls everybody. Not all come. “The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). It is God who calls men.

Separating from God – Since the Galatian brethren were separating from Him that had called them, and as God is the one who graciously calls men, it is evident that they were separating from God. Thus we see that it was no slight thing that called forth this epistle. Paul’s brethren were in mortal danger, and he could not spend time on compliments, but must needs get at once to the subject, and present it in as clear and direct terms as possible. It is a small matter to be joined to or separated from men, but a matter of vital importance to be joined to God. Many Adventists seem to think that everything depends on their being members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; if they are only declared ‘members in good standing’, they feel secure. But the only thing worth considering is, Am I joined to the Lord, and walking in His truth? If one is joined to the Lord, he will very soon find his place among God’s people, for those who are not God’s people will not have a zealous, consistent follower of God among them very long (see Isaiah 66:5; John 9:22, 33-34; 15:18-21; 16:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12). When Barnabas went to Antioch, he exhorted the brethren “that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:22-23). That was all that was necessary. If we do that, we shall certainly be with God’s own people.

Another Gospel – The Gospel is “the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth” (Romans 1:16). God Himself is the power, so that separation from God means separation from the Gospel of Christ, who is the power of God. Nothing can be called a gospel, unless it professes to give salvation. That which professes to offer nothing but death, cannot be called a gospel. “Gospel” means ‘joyful news’ ‘good tidings,’ and a promise of death does not answer that description. In order for any false doctrine to pass as the Gospel, it must pretend to be the way of life; otherwise it could not deceive men. It is evident, therefore, that the Galatians were being seduced from God, by something that promised them life and salvation. The question consequently would be, ‘Which is the true Gospel? Is it the one that Paul preached? or the one the other men set forth?’ Therefore again we see that this epistle must be an emphatic presentation of the true Gospel as distinguished from every false gospel.

No Other Gospel – Just as Jesus Christ is the only power of God, and there is no other name than that of Jesus, given among men, whereby salvation can be obtained, so there can be only one Gospel. A sham is nothing. A mask is not a man. So this *other gospel*, to which the Galatian brethren were being enticed, was only a perverted gospel, a counterfeit, a sham, and no real Gospel at all. Since there is no other Gospel now, there never could have been any other, for God changes not. So the Gospel which Paul preached to the Galatians as well as to the Corinthians, – “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2) – was the Gospel that was preached by Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Isaiah.

“Accursed” – If any man, or even an angel from heaven should preach any other Gospel than that which Paul preached, he would bring himself under a curse. There are not two standards of right and wrong. That which will bring a curse today would have produced the same result back then. Thus we find that the way of salvation has been exactly the same in every age. The Gospel was preached to Abraham (Galatians 3:8), and the prophets preached the Gospel (1 Peter 1:11-12). But if the Gospel preached by them had been different from that preached by Paul, they would have been accursed. But why should one be accursed for preaching a different Gospel? – Because he is the means of fastening others in the curse. “Cursed be he that maketh the blind to wander out of the way” (Deuteronomy 27:18). If this be so of the one who causes a physically blind man to stumble, how much more must it apply to one who causes a soul to stumble to its eternal ruin? To delude men with a false hope of salvation, to cause them to put their trust in that which can by no means deliver them, what could possibly be more wicked? It is

to lead men to build their house over the bottomless pit. Well might the apostle deliberately reiterate his anathema! And here again we see the gravity of the situation that called forth this epistle. The Galatian brethren, having been led astray by accursed teachers, were themselves in danger of damnation.

“An Angel from Heaven” – But is there any danger, any possibility, that an angel from heaven would preach any other than the one, true Gospel? – Most assuredly, but it would not be an angel recently come from heaven. We read of “the angels that sinned” (2 Peter 2:4), and “kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation” (Jude 6), and the habitation from which they were cast was heaven (Revelation 12:7-9). “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). It is they who come professing to be the spirits of the departed, bringing messages fresh from the realms above (where the departed are not), and preaching invariably “another Gospel” than the Gospel of Jesus Christ. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1). “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

Not Men-Pleasers – Paul exhorts servants to be obedient to their “masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God” (Colossians 3:22). If it applies to them, how much more should it apply to those who are preaching the Gospel! So Paul declares that he is not seeking to persuade, to conciliate, to gain the favour of, or to please men, but God. The Lord alone is his Master. “We are ambassadors for Christ,” and this is true of every Christian to the extent of the ability that God has given him. We are Christ’s ambassador, to Him, not to men, are we answerable. To please our Master is our sole business. As soon as we seek to please men, we cease to serve Him.

Unbounded Freedom – “He that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord’s freeman” (1 Corinthians 7:22). Paul, “an ambassador in bonds” desired the prayers of his brethren, that utterance might be given him, that he might open his mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel (Ephesians 6:19-20). He who recognises his relation to Christ as ambassador, is absolutely free. He need fear no man. Nay, it is impossible for him to fear man, since he knows the infinite power that sustains him. He can proclaim the Gospel as boldly before kings as before peasants. How can he fear kings, when he serves the King of kings? And if he does present his message in the presence of God and the angels, how can he fear the face of any man? Such holy boldness is worth untold worlds.

Not of Man – Paul declared that he did not receive the Gospel from any man, but that it came to him directly from Christ. In the account of his conversion (Acts 9:1-22; 22:10), we see that a man was sent to Paul with a message from the Lord; nevertheless it is true that Paul did not receive the Gospel from man. If he had, then he would have been a servant of men. As he was sent, not by man, “but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead” (Galatians 1:1), he carried only the message which the Lord Himself gave him. Note how he repeats that what he tells he received of the Lord (1 Corinthians 11:23; 1 Thessalonians 4:15). “The things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 14:37). That was the secret of Paul’s boldness. Paul had no doubts about his message, as he must have had if he had received it from man. We may have this same confidence, and indeed must have it if we are Christ’s servants. If we receive the Gospel from men, then we are not sure of our ground. No doubt that God employs human agents, for the Gospel is committed to men, but, no matter whose form we see, no matter what man God uses, we must recognise God’s voice, and receive the message fresh from Him, else we have no assurance of its correctness. We need not depend on any man or any church to substantiate the Word of God, or for our knowledge that this or that is or is not His Word. “Ye know all things.” “These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you; but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and it truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:20, 26-27). Even though a man has truth, and if he has received it through some man as the instrument of the Spirit, – if he traces his reception of it to that man, or his mind runs to that man and to what he said, as assurance for what he holds, he has not yet the truth as he ought to have it. When a man recognises the voice of God in a truth that he hears, and receives it as coming directly from the Lord, then it is so, and he knows it for a certainty. He is then free from men.

The Revelation of Jesus Christ – Note that it is not simply a revelation *from* Jesus Christ, but the “*revelation of Jesus Christ.*” It was not simply that Christ told Paul something, but that Christ Himself revealed Himself to Paul, and in him, and He is the truth. That this is what is meant here may be seen from Galatians 1:16, where we read that God revealed His Son in Paul, that he might preach Him among the heathen. So we read: “We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know Him that is true, and we are in Him that is true, even in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). The mystery of the Gospel is Christ in the believer, the hope of glory (Colossians 1:25-27). Thus, every true Christian not only may, but also must, be as sure of the Gospel that he believes and which he makes known to others, as Paul was. Thank God for the Gospel!