

# Exposition of Galatians 1:1-7

Sermon Series:  
Guarding the Gospel

Sermon Title:  
Troubled Believers

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Sometime between the years 1527 – 1529 a prolific figure in church history named Martin Luther would author a hymn by the title ‘A Mighty Fortress Is Our God’ which was intended to be a paraphrase of Psalm 46. Without doubt the hymn has become dear to every true bible believing Christian over the passing centuries, perhaps one reason for its great influence among the people of God is how it so vividly captures and paints for us a picture of the true struggle that we all face in the battle against the great enemy of the Church, that old dragon, that wicked serpent, Satan.

“Did we in our own strength confide, our striving would be losing”. “Though this world, with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us”. “For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe; his craft and pow’r are great; and armed with cruel hate, on earth is not his equal”.

This great foe, wants nothing more than to blind, confuse and if at all possible deceive the followers of Christ. He wishes to cripple you and I (spiritually speaking) so that we are not a threat to his schemes and plans against the kingdom of Christ and His gospel.

This, in fact is at the root of the problem here in Chapter 1 of Galatians which immediately is drawn to our attention by it’s author, the Apostle Paul.

To help us with the context of today’s introduction allow me to set up a little background information for us as we come into our series of teachings in Galatians that I’m entitling Gospel Guardians.

It is believed by the scholars that this letter by Paul, under divine revelation was penned in either AD50 or AD53, making it the earliest/oldest of Paul’s epistles, additionally it is believed, based

upon the data contained within the letter, to have been written at the beginning of Paul's second missionary journey from the city of Corinth. We gather from v.2 he is writing it to a group of churches "churches of Galatia" which were in the Roman province of Galatia, modern day Turkey. And this of course implies that every single church in Galatia had its independent autonomy before God, Paul was not writing to "thee" Church of Galatia, but rather all the various, autonomous churches which he had established throughout the region during his first missionary journey as recorded in the book of ACTS (Chps.13 & 14).

The letter, as we shall begin to see today will deal with many issues that were facing these churches and also offer for us much spiritual and doctrinal teachings that will exhort and encourage us in our faith as Christians living today. We will in this series deal with justification by faith, the law and the promise, Christian maturity, the analogy of Hagar and Sarah, faith vs. works, practical Christian living.

By and far, the main theme or problem being address in Paul's letter was the one which was caused by a group of false teachers we call Judaizers, which in the Greek means "to live according to Jewish customs".

As we approach this series, it's vital we cover this ground concerning the Judaizers, a group of people who during the conversions which took place in Jerusalem were apparently impressed with some aspect of the message of Christ. They may have seemed to have truly become Christians, but they weren't, and were perhaps a minority in the early church at Jerusalem, however we can't be completely certain as to how many there were, however they soon came to a point as Jews who believed (with their heads at

least) in the gospel of Jesus to hold to and teach a sort of hybrid position which sounded like this: “We are Jews who yes believe in Jesus, however as Jews we still insist and believe that in addition to the sacrifice of Christ, we must also continue to observe all the other aspects of the Jewish law in order to inherit eternal life.”

This of course included all the particular festival days, their male children must needs be circumcised, all the dietary restrictions and conformity to all the law of Moses and without these, they taught we can't be truly saved.

In essence what they did was reduced the total sum of the atonement and cross-work of Christ down to these lowly man performed rituals which had no real saving power in them at all, but were only shadows and types pointing forward to their total completion in the life and work of Jesus. Important shadows, yes. Appointed rituals, instituted by God, yes...but done away with in Christ.

Now these false teachers, these Judaizers, were zealous to maintain the ancient distinctions that separated the Jews from the Gentiles. They wanted to keep up the barrier which Christ himself destroyed and so, as they began to hear reports of how Paul's evangelistic efforts were being blessed throughout region, they became outraged at the fact that Paul was not insisting these newly converted Gentiles didn't needed to be also circumcised or needed to also observe certain Jewish feasts, so outraged in fact that they actually financed certain of their men to go out and follow up after Paul and his other preachers had left an area in order to 'trouble' the believers with their heretical doctrines causing no end of trouble in the churches, and specifically here in the region of Galatia.

These men, these Judaizers were legalists in the truest sense. Contrary to the modern Antinomian mind of the west, legalism is not the teaching that the Commandments and all the principles that flow out from them are just as binding upon God's people as they were when originally given. No, rather legalism (in its classic and historic use) is just what these Judaizers were teaching, which was: that in order to go to heaven you must not only have Christ, but also you must add to your faith works.

As recorded in Acts 15 around the year AD49, a year or so before our text today, Paul and Barnabas had an encounter with these men, and it stirred up quite a controversy which led the autonomous, independent church of Antioch sending Paul, Barnabas and other men from the church to go and meet with and discuss these Judaizers and their teachings with the elders and some of the other apostles who were present at the autonomous, independent church in Jerusalem.

This meeting of two independent churches, is often, if not most of the times, mistakenly referred to as a counsel. But, I agree with many who do not see Acts 15 as a counsel which was to determine the elements and requirements of the gospel for the Gentile converts. No friends, Paul did not go to Jerusalem to ask a counsel what their decision would be about the gospel that he was to preach to the Gentiles, he was not there to entertain the demands of the Judaizers.

Rather, we can safely conclude that Paul was there perhaps to One: inquire if these false teachers were really sent out by the authority of the Jerusalem church, and if so they had better reign them in and get them corrected on their gospel, or perhaps he was there to clarify himself and the gospel that he had been teaching among the Gentiles in case the Judaizers were smearing his name

and his teachings. Again, ACTS 15, wasn't a counsel of the mother church in Jerusalem deciding for all the other churches what the gospel was going to entail for the Gentiles, because that was already established by Christ from eternity past. The gospel was salvation by faith, it had always been by faith.

So this is the foundation coming into the book of Galatians. It is a key letter from Paul in defense of the true faith, only perhaps is the book of Romans as vital to our arsenal as Gospel Guardians seeking like Paul, to defend the True Gospel.

Paul, a Gospel Guardian ministering among the troubled believers throughout Galatia. The sermon theme then for today in Chapter One naturally comes to us from v.7 'there be some that trouble you.'

Are you a 'Troubled Believer'? Well, I hope and pray you aren't dear church, I pray that you are immovable in your faith as it rests in the unfinished work of Christ. I trust that you are maturing in your walk with Christ, that you are earnest in your desire to live for him and not troubled by the many modern ideologies that have influenced so much of evangelicalism in our present day, which strikingly will be drawn into focus for us in this letter as Paul deals with these false teachers and their doctrines.

## **APOSTOLIC GREETING**

### **v.1a The Sender – Sent by Christ.**

• *'an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ'*

We have covered the ground of Paul's apostleship before and the requirements of NT apostles and so I won't here cover that topic again, but do allow me here to simply repeat that men today running around claiming to be apostles have no idea what they are

talking about. The modern day resurgence of this kind of teaching is connected in a large way with the whole ‘Restoration Movement’ rooted in the 70’s which was also closely affiliated with what is known as the Toronto Blessing and other Pentecostal/Charismatic doctrines, however unlike Paul none of these modern day “apostles” has witnessed the risen Christ, oh yes they may be ‘apostles’ in the sense of being sent on a commission from their local churches and in that case they ought to view call themselves missionaries to avoid confusion.

Paul here makes clear that he was not made an Apostle by man but by Christ, this was in order to make clear to his readers his Apostolic authority since the false teachers were calling it into question. Paul was the only living Apostle who had not been taught by Christ during His earthly ministry, this is why Paul refers to himself as the one born out of due time (1 Cor.15:8).

#### **v.1b The Risen Christ**

• “and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead” no doubt by pointing his audience to the resurrected Savior, Paul is amplifying that he personally witnessed the risen Lord and thus also was divinely and directly commissioned by Him, prior to ever meeting any of the other Apostles.

The text says ‘the Father, who raised Him (Christ) from the dead’. Does this imply or teach the Christ possessed not the power to raise Himself? If so this would contradict what He told the Jews in JOHN 2:19 “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” And what about ROMANS 8:11 where the Spirit is mentioned as raising up Jesus. How then are to understand this verse before us.

Do you recall PSALM 2 from last week, and how that in v.7, we learned that after Christ had satisfied all the stipulations of the eternal Covenant He was granted dominion and power as King over all things. How that upon the resurrection morning, He as the

triumphant King arose by the essence of His inherent power which he had eternal possessed as the second person of the Godhead.

The Father's involvement here in v.1 ought to be understood in the sense that by the resurrection being allowed to take place, the Father shows His approval and acceptance of all that Christ had done and completed according to the Eternal Covenant, otherwise known as the Covenant of Redemption (Eph. 1:11). Christ could not have raised Himself from the dead, even with all His eternal and inherit power, unless He first fully satisfied all the requirements of the Covenant by which He secured the salvation and eternal life for the Church.

### **v.2 The Recipients**

- *“unto the churches of Galatia”* Now, I already referenced this during the introduction, however it is worth mentioning with regard to New Testament ecclesiology (nature and structure of the Church), Paul is not writing to the Church of Galatia. No, but he is writing to the ‘churches’, that is recognized, independent and autonomous churches which he had and his preachers had established and now have Jesus Christ as their head.

### **v.3 An Apostolic Benediction**

- *“Grace be to you...”* Now, they are already Christians and have grace, however Paul here, under divine inspiration speaking the very words of God utters unto these troubled believers a blessing of God's favor, kindness and peace.

Observe with me the way in which the Apostle speaks toward these believers as if he is speaking directly for God! This would be outrageously arrogant if he were not an Apostle.

We can only speak this way in modified terms... “May grace be to you” or “May peace be to you” you see we may wish for it, we may pray for it, but dear church, Paul here speaks with

divine authority as if he is the one dispensing the grace. There is no ‘May’ about this benediction, again because Paul is an Apostle and these are Gods words not Paul’s.

*~ These are the words of an Apostle here in this greeting from vv.1-3 and now, Paul beings to immediately deal with the subject at hand – the Gospel.*

#### **v.4 The Gospel Communicated**

• “...gave himself for sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world...” The very first thing which Paul wants to make clear is what the gospel wasn’t. It was never to be considered as a message of softly, softly or gently, gently come see who Christ is. No, dear friends it wasn’t that all. It was and always has been what we see plainly in v.4 a declaration about the seriousness of sin and its destructive power over our souls and that we need help and the kind of help we nor any other man can supply but that only Jesus can offer.

The gospel which Paul preached, and is wishing to guard in the hearts and minds of these troubled believers was one that immediately is presented as depicting a great crisis to the minds of his audience. That their sins are so serious that a death is required in order that they be forgotten, that a life was required to remove their guilt.

This series of studies in Galatians is entitled Gospel Guardians. And part of guarding the gospel is what see here in v.4, that it is to be communicated in a way that is faithful and unashamedly honest. This is vital as we seek to guard the gospel.

The moment, we begin in any way to portray the gospel as a soft and gentle, come check out Christ and our Christian fellowship with unregenerate man - all we will create is moralized country clubs and religious societies that approach of gospel

communication is a sure recipe for churches that are made up of wood, hay and stubble.

Now, the honest, straightforward truth in Paul's gospel communication was the preaching and understanding of the old preachers, but sadly now brethren the evangelical church has been greatly influenced with another way of communicating the gospel.

Certainly many of you have heard of the book by a man named Rick Warren called the Purpose Driven Book approx. 15 yrs. ago. This book has sold an astounding 40-50 MILLION + copies topping the Wall Street Journal best sellers list of all time as well as Publishers Weekly and has had untold impact and influence among the evangelical church world-wide and in particularly here in the west.

In this book, there are yes fundamentals of the faith sprinkled throughout it, however it fails to draw them all together and present to the mind of the reader the crisis that they must be confronted with – that they are condemned and damned before a thrice-holy God, their Creator unless you flee to the cross of Christ and outside of Christ, your unforgiven sins will ensure you an eternal torment in hell!

No, no this man insists, this is not how to communicate the gospel, instead, the philosophy is something like this: come see who Jesus is, and what he can offer your empty life. Come hang out with us Christians and see for yourself we are not all that serious about daily living and our deliverance from this present evil world (so long as it's not explicitly immoral of course), you'll see there is not all that much you'll have to surrender to be a Christian. You see church, that's drastically different from Paul's communication.

Now this ideology, this system of teachings by this man has become in some way, shape or form the new norm in evangelism.

Many who would even denounce some of his doctrinal beliefs outside of his methods are none the less still influenced in some way or another in their own missionary or evangelistic endeavors.

Never give people the idea or thought that becoming a Christian will require of them any real separation or deliverance from the world. Never present the gospel as something too seriously convicting, no keep it softly, softly.

Let me just say this before moving on, sin, forgiveness and life was at the very beginning of every encounter with Jesus and His Apostles. This is our pattern, this is our gospel. Of course, Jesus gives us many examples of the different ways he approached different people, but he always upfront deals with their soul's greatest need – repentance and faith.

- v.5 The gospel, the ministry of reconciliation is to be guarded by the church of Christ for it is the glory of God for ever and ever.

### **Paul's Astonishment Expressed**

#### **v.6**

- *'I marvel that ye are so soon removed...'* Here is the only Epistle from Paul that does not contain any commendation or expressions of thanksgiving for the recipients. None the less they are Christians, in fact he teaches us so here referring to them as the called ones and additionally in v.11 he calls them brethren...but here with this phrase at the beginning of v.6, it is as though Paul is saying "How could you do it?"

He is literally astonished that within only a couple of years they have turned from the true gospel. Not because they didn't believe it, not because they weren't truly saved...but because they had become 'troubled believers' (v.7) 'trouble' in the original Greek suggest "being perplexed in the mind, uncertain, full of confusion and doubt". Yes, they were true believers but they were

lightweight believers easily lead astray. They may have thought to themselves...”Oh, listen to these men, they sound really smart, they seem to have a lot of influence and an appearance of success, after all they are from Jerusalem, surely what they are suggesting has to be considered!” so forth and so on. They were ‘troubled believers’.

Are any of us here in this text today, dear friends? We have genuinely found the Lord but have become troubled in our thinking and thus haven’t progressed any further, we haven’t fully grasped what it is in the gospel that Jesus has done for us and still now continues to do in and through us, thus being so easily lead astray unto another gospel.

Perhaps another gospel similar to that of the Judaizers here in today’s text which teaches that we have to add something to the finished cross work of Christ in order to really ensure we receive eternal life...this is certainly true of many troubled Christians today believing that they are earning ‘saving, eternal favor’ with God through the good works which He enables them perform.

Or perhaps another popular gospel today that teaches its all of grace and in fact now that you are in Christ there is no law which regulates and governs the practice of your faith, come as your and stay as you are. No need to surrender anything, no need to talk about sanctification and mortifying our flesh...no, no none of that. Easy, easy, take religion in its silver slippers.

• Christ called you into His grace!

How, Paul is seeming to say could you fall into such trouble and confusion. You have been effectually called into the grace of Christ and those who have received this call, will heed the voice of God in the Scripture when faithfully and unapologetically presented. Those who have been effectually called of Christ will not stone the servant of God who points out the principals and

precepts of His will as revealed in the Scriptures, rather the truly called will come to see that any other gospel than that preached by Paul is not another alternative of the same gospel worthy of consideration – but is all together a different gospel.

### **Additions to the Gospel is no Gospel at all.**

#### **v.7**

- *‘which is not another....and pervert the gospel’* The insight to just what Paul is getting at lies in word ‘pervert’ in the Greek it carries with it the meaning to completely turn around and change.

You see the news which the Judaizers were teaching was a completely different gospel, it wasn’t good news friends, it was bad news, it sought to place a yoke upon these early believers which Christ by his death removed.

Jhn 1:17 For the law was given by Moses, [but] grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

### **CLOSING THOUGHTS**

I pray that we are not, nor ever will become like the troubled believers here in Galatia, but rather we, like Martin Luther in his day, understand that there is a real enemy which seeks to cripple us and our effectiveness for the witness and testimony of the gospel.

Let Luther’s words from his infamous hymn encourage us as we depart “The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him, his rage we can endure, for lo his doom is sure, one little word shall fell him.”

That word friends, is the true gospel which we must forever guard.