

CHAPTER 1

In this chapter, after the preface or introduction (v. 15), the apostle severely reproves these churches for their defection from the faith (v. 69), and then proves his own apostleship, which his enemies had brought them to question,

- I. From his end and design in preaching the gospel (v. 10).
- II. From his having received it by immediate revelation (v. 11, 12). For the proof of which he acquaints them,
 1. What his former conversation was (v. 13, 14).
 2. How he was converted, and called to the apostleship (v. 15, 16).
 3. How he behaved himself afterwards (v. 16 to the end).

✠ GALATIANS 1:1-5

THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS

In these verses we have the preface or introduction to the epistle, where observe,

I. The person or persons from whom this epistle is sent from Paul *an apostle, etc., and all the brethren that were with him.*

1. The epistle is sent from Paul; he only was the penman of it. And, because there were some among the Galatians who endeavoured to lessen his character and authority, in the front of it he gives a general account both of his office and of the manner in which he was called to it, which afterwards, in this and the following chapter, he enlarges more upon. As to his office, he was an apostle. He is not afraid to style himself so, though his enemies would scarcely allow him this title: and, to let them see that he did not assume this character without just ground, he acquaints them how he was called to this dignity and office, and assures them that his commission to it was wholly divine, for he was an apostle, *not of man, neither by man*; he had not the common call of an ordinary minister, but an extraordinary call from heaven to this office. He neither received his qualification for it, nor his designation to it, by the mediation of men, but

had both the one and the other directly from above; for he was an apostle by *Jesus Christ*, he had his instructions and commission immediately from him, and consequently from *God the Father*, who was one with him in respect of his divine nature, and who had appointed him, as Mediator, to be the apostle and high priest of our profession, and as such to authorize others to this office. He adds, *Who raised him from the dead*, both to acquaint us that herein God the Father gave a public testimony to Christ's being his Son and the promised Messiah, and also that, as his call to the apostleship was immediately from Christ, so it was after his resurrection from the dead, and when he had entered upon his exalted state; so that he had reason to look upon himself, not only as standing upon a level with the other apostles, but as in some sort preferred above them; for, whereas they were called by him when on earth, he had his call from him when in heaven. Thus does the apostle, being constrained to it by his adversaries, magnify his office, which shows that though men should by no means be proud of any authority they are possessed of, yet at certain times and upon certain occasions it may become needful to assert it. But,

2. He joins all the brethren that were with him in the inscription of the epistle, and writes in their name as well as his own. By *the brethren that were with him* may be understood either the Christians in common of that place where he now was, or such as were employed as ministers of the gospel. These, notwithstanding his own superior character and attainments, he is ready to own as his brethren; and, though he alone wrote the epistle, yet he joins them with himself in the inscription of it. Herein, as he shows his own great modesty and humility, and how remote he was from an assuming temper, so he might do this to dispose these churches to a greater regard to what he wrote, since hereby it would appear that he had their concurrence with him in the doctrine which he had preached, and was now about to confirm, and that it was no other than what was both published and professed by others as well as himself.

II. To whom this epistle is sent *to the churches of Galatia*. There were several churches at that time in this country, and it should seem that all of them were more or less corrupted through the arts of those seducers who had crept in among them; and therefore Paul, on whom *came daily the care of all the churches*, being deeply affected with their state, and concerned for their recovery to the faith and establishment in it, writes this epistle to them. He directs it to all of them, as being all more or less concerned in the matter of it; and he gives them the name of *churches*,

though they had done enough to forfeit it, for corrupt churches are never allowed to be churches: no doubt there were some among them who still continued in the faith, and he was not without hope that others might be recovered to it.

III. The apostolical benediction, v. 3. Herein the apostle, and the brethren who were with him, wish these churches *grace and peace from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ*. This is the usual blessing wherewith he blesses the churches in the name of the Lord *grace and peace*. Grace includes God's good-will towards us and his good work upon us; and peace implies in it all that inward comfort, or outward prosperity, which is really needful for us; and they come from God the Father as the fountain, through Jesus Christ as the channel of conveyance. Both these the apostle wishes for these Christians. But we may observe, First grace, and then peace, for there can be no true peace without grace. Having mentioned the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot pass without enlarging upon his love; and therefore adds (v. 4), *Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver, etc.* Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins, as a great sacrifice to make atonement for us; this the justice of God required, and to this he freely submitted for our sakes. One great end hereof was *to deliver us from this present evil world*; not only to redeem us from the wrath of God, and the curse of the law, but also to recover us from the corruption that is in the world through lust, and to rescue us from the vicious practices and customs of it, unto which we are naturally enslaved; and possibly also to set us free from the Mosaic constitution, for so *aión houtos* is used, ^{<406>}1 Corinthians 2:6, 8. From this we may note,

1. This present world is an evil world: it has become so by the sin of man, and it is so on account of the sin and sorrow with which it abounds and the many snares and temptations to which we are exposed as long as we continue in it. But,

2. Jesus Christ has died to deliver us from this present evil world, not presently to remove his people out of it, but to rescue them from the power of it, to keep them from the evil of it, and in due time to possess them of another and better world. This, the apostle informs us, he has done *according to the will of God and our Father*. In offering up himself a sacrifice for this end and purpose, he acted by the appointment of the Father, as well as with his own free consent; and therefore we have the greatest reason to depend upon the efficacy and acceptableness of what he

has done and suffered for us; yea, hence we have encouragement to look upon God as our Father, for thus the apostle here represents him: as he is the Father of our Lord Jesus, so in and through him he is also the Father of all true believers, as our blessed Saviour himself acquaints us (~~4017~~ John 20:17), when he tells his disciples that he was ascending to his Father and their Father.

The apostle, having thus taken notice of the great love wherewith Christ hath loved us, concludes this preface with a solemn ascription of praise and glory to him (v. 5): *To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.* Intimating that on this account he is justly entitled to our highest esteem and regard. Or this doxology may be considered as referring both to God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom he had just before been wishing grace and peace. They are both the proper objects of our worship and adoration, and all honour and glory are perpetually due to them, both on account of their own infinite excellences, and also on account of the blessings we receive from them.

~~4016~~ GALATIANS 1:6-9

THE APOSTLE'S CONCERN AT THEIR DEFECTION

Here the apostle comes to the body of the epistle; and he begins it with a more general reproof of these churches for their unsteadiness in the faith, which he afterwards, in some following parts of it, enlarges more upon. Here we may observe,

I. How much he was concerned at their defection: *I marvel*, etc. It filled him at once with the greatest surprise and sorrow. Their sin and folly were that they did not hold fast the doctrine of Christianity as it had been preached to them, but suffered themselves to be removed from the purity and simplicity of it. And there were several things by which their defection was greatly aggravated; as,

1. That they were *removed from him that had called them*; not only from the apostle, who had been the instrument of calling them into the fellowship of the gospel, but from God himself, by whose order and direction the gospel was preached to them, and they were invited to a

participation of the privileges of it: so that herein they had been guilty of a great abuse of his kindness and mercy towards them.

2. That they had been *called into the grace of Christ*. As the gospel which had been preached to them was the most glorious discovery of divine grace and mercy in Christ Jesus; so thereby they had been called to partake of the greatest blessings and benefits, such as justification, and reconciliation with God here, and eternal life and happiness hereafter. These our Lord Jesus has purchased for us at the expense of his precious blood, and freely bestows upon all who sincerely accept of him: and therefore, in proportion to the greatness of the privilege they enjoyed, such were their sin and folly in deserting it and suffering themselves to be drawn off from the established way of obtaining these blessings.

3. That they were *so soon removed*. In a very little time they lost that relish and esteem of this grace of Christ which they seemed to have, and too easily fell in with those who taught justification by the works of the law, as many did, who had been bred up in the opinions and notions of the Pharisees, which they mingled with the doctrine of Christ, and so corrupted it; and this, as it was an instance of their weakness, so it was a further aggravation of their guilt.

4. That they were removed to *another gospel, which yet was not another*. Thus the apostle represents the doctrine of these judaizing teachers; he calls it another gospel, because it opened a different way of justification and salvation from that which was revealed in the gospel, namely, by works, and not by faith in Christ. And yet he adds, "*Which is not another*" you will find it to be no gospel at all not really another gospel, but the perverting of the gospel of Christ, and the overturning of the foundations of that" whereby he intimates that those who go about to establish any other way to heaven than what the gospel of Christ has revealed are guilty of a gross perversion of it, and in the issue will find themselves wretchedly mistaken. Thus the apostle endeavours to impress upon these Galatians a due sense of their guilt in forsaking the gospel way of justification; and yet at the same time he tempers his reproof with mildness and tenderness towards them, and represents them as rather drawn into it by the arts and industry of some that troubled them than as coming into it of their own accord, which, though it did not excuse them, yet was some extenuation of their fault. And hereby he teaches us that, in

reproving others, as we should be faithful, so we should also be gentle, and endeavour *to restore them in the spirit of meekness*, ~~810~~ Galatians 6:1.

II. How confident he was that the gospel he had preached to them was the only true gospel. He was so fully persuaded of this that he pronounced an anathema upon those who pretended to preach any other gospel (v. 8), and, to let them see that this did not proceed from any rashness or intemperate zeal in him, he repeated it, v. 9. This will not justify our thundering out anathemas against those who differ from us in minor things. It is only against those who forge a new gospel, who overturn the foundation of the covenant of grace, by setting up the works of the law in the place of Christ's righteousness, and corrupting Christianity with Judaism, that Paul denounces this. He puts the case: "Suppose we should preach any other gospel; nay, suppose an angel from heaven should:" not as if it were possible for an angel from heaven to be the messenger of a lie; but it is expressed so the more to strengthen what he was about to say. "If you have any other gospel preached to you by any other person, under our name, or under colour of having it from an angel himself, you must conclude that you are imposed upon: and whoever preaches another gospel lays himself under a curse, and is in danger of laying you under it too."

~~810~~ GALATIANS 1:10-24

THE APOSTLE'S INTEGRITY

What Paul had said more generally, in the preface of this epistle, he now proceeds more particularly to enlarge upon. There he had declared himself to be an apostle of Christ; and here he comes more directly to support his claim to that character and office. There were some in the churches of Galatia who were prevailed with to call this in question; for those who preached up the ceremonial law did all they could to lessen Paul's reputation, who preached the pure gospel of Christ to the Gentiles: and therefore he here sets himself to prove the divinity both of his mission and doctrine, that thereby he might wipe off the aspersions which his enemies had cast upon him, and recover these Christians into a better opinion of the gospel he had preached to them. This he gives sufficient evidence of,

I. From the scope and design of his ministry, which was *not to persuade men, but God*, etc. The meaning of this may be either that in his preaching the gospel he did not act in obedience to men, but God, who had called him to this work and office; or that his aim therein was to bring persons to the obedience, not of men, but of God. As he professed to act by a commission from God; so that which he chiefly aimed at was to promote his glory, by recovering sinners into a state of subjection to him. And as this was the great end he was pursuing, so, agreeably hereunto, *he did not seek to please men*. He did not, in his doctrine, accommodate himself to the humours of persons, either to gain their affection or to avoid their resentment; but his great care was to approve himself to God. The judaizing teachers, by whom these churches were corrupted, had discovered a very different temper; they mixed works with faith, and the law with the gospel, only to please the Jews, whom they were willing to court and keep in with, that they might escape persecution. But Paul was a man of another spirit; he was not so solicitous to please them, nor to mitigate their rage against him, as to alter the doctrine of Christ either to gain their favour or to avoid their fury. And he gives this very good reason for it, that, *if he yet pleased men, he would not be the servant of Christ*. These he knew were utterly inconsistent, and that no man could serve two such masters; and therefore, though he would not needlessly displease any, yet he dared not allow himself to gratify men at the expense of his faithfulness to Christ. Thus, from the sincerity of his aims and intentions in the discharge of his office, he proves that he was truly an apostle of Christ. And from this his temper and behaviour we may note,

- 1.** That the great end which ministers of the gospel should aim at is to bring men to God.
- 2.** That those who are faithful will not seek to please men, but to approve themselves to God.
- 3.** That they must not be solicitous to please men, if they would approve themselves faithful servants to Christ. But, if this argument should not be thought sufficient, he goes on to prove his apostleship,

II. From the manner wherein he received the gospel which he preached to them, concerning which he assures them (v. 11, 12) that he had it not by information from others, but by revelation from heaven. One thing peculiar in the character of an apostle was that he had been called to, and

instructed for, this office immediately by Christ himself. And in this he here shows that he was by no means defective, whatever his enemies might suggest to the contrary. Ordinary ministers, as they receive their call to preach the gospel by the mediation of others, so it is by means of the instruction and assistance of others that they are brought to the knowledge of it. But Paul acquaints them that he had his knowledge of the gospel, as well as his authority to preach it, directly from the Lord Jesus: the gospel which he preached was not *after man; he neither received it of man, nor was he taught it by man*, but by immediate inspiration, or revelation from Christ himself. This he was concerned to make out, to prove himself an apostle: and to this purpose,

1. He tells them what his education was, and what, accordingly, his conversation in time past had been, v. 13, 14. Particularly, he acquaints them that he had been brought up in the Jewish religion, and *that he had profited in it above many his equals of his own nation that he had been exceedingly zealous of the traditions of the elders*, such doctrines and customs as had been invented by their fathers, and conveyed down from one generation to another; yea, to such a degree that, in his zeal for them, *he had beyond measure persecuted the church of God, and wasted it*. He had not only been a rejecter of the Christian religion, notwithstanding the many evident proofs that were given of its divine origin; but he had been a persecutor of it too, and had applied himself with the utmost violence and rage to destroy the professors of it. This Paul often takes notice of, for the magnifying of that free and rich grace which had wrought so wonderful a change in him, whereby of so great a sinner he was made a sincere penitent, and from a persecutor had become an apostle. And it was very fit to mention it here; for it would hence appear that he was not led to Christianity, as many others are, purely by education, since he had been bred up in an enmity and opposition to it; and they might reasonably suppose that it must be something very extraordinary which had made so great a change in him, which had conquered the prejudices of his education, and brought him not only to profess, but to preach, that doctrine, which he had before so vehemently opposed.

2. In how wonderful a manner he was turned from the error of his ways, brought to the knowledge and faith of Christ, and appointed to the office of an apostle, v. 15, 16. This was not done in an ordinary way, nor by ordinary means, but in an extraordinary manner; for,

(1.) God had *separated him hereunto from his mother's womb*: the change that was wrought in him was in pursuance of a divine purpose concerning him, whereby he was appointed to be a Christian and an apostle, before he came into the world, or had done either good or evil.

(2.) he was *called by his grace*. All who are savingly converted are called by the grace of God; their conversion is the effect of his good pleasure concerning them, and is effected by his power and grace in them. But there was something peculiar in the case of Paul, both in the suddenness and in the greatness of the change wrought in him, and also in the manner wherein it was effected, which was not by the mediation of others, as the instruments of it, but by Christ's personal appearance to him, and immediate operation upon him, whereby it was rendered a more special and extraordinary instance of divine power and favour.

(3.) He had Christ *revealed in him*. He was not only revealed to him, but in him. It will but little avail us to have Christ revealed to us if he is not also revealed in us; but this was not the case of Paul. It pleased God *to reveal his Son in him*, to bring him to the knowledge of Christ and his gospel by special and immediate revelation. And,

(4.) It was with this design, that he should preach him among the heathen; not only that he should embrace him himself, but preach him to others; so that he was both a Christian and an apostle by revelation.

3. He acquaints them how he behaved himself hereupon, from v. 16, to the end. Being thus called to his work and office, *he conferred not with flesh and blood*. This may be taken more generally, and so we may learn from it that, when God calls us by his grace, we must not consult flesh and blood. But the meaning of it here is that he did not consult men; he did not apply to any others for their advice and direction; *neither did he go up to Jerusalem, to those that were apostles before him*, as though he needed to be approved by them, or to receive any further instructions or authority from them: but, instead of that, he steered another course, and *went into Arabia*, either as a place of retirement proper for receiving further divine revelations, or in order to preach the gospel there among the Gentiles, being appointed to be the apostle of the Gentiles; and thence *he returned again to Damascus*, where he had first begun his ministry, and whence he had with difficulty escaped the rage of his enemies, Acts 9. It was not till *three years after his conversion that he went up to Jerusalem, to see Peter*; and when he did so he made but a very short stay with him, no more than

fifteen days; nor, while he was there, did he go much into conversation; for others of the apostles he saw none, but James, the Lord's brother. So that it could not well be pretended that he was indebted to any other either for his knowledge of the gospel or his authority to preach it; but it appeared that both his qualifications for, and his call to, the apostolic office were extraordinary and divine. This account being of importance, to establish his claim to this office, to remove the unjust censures of his adversaries, and to recover the Galatians from the impressions they had received to his prejudice, he confirms it by a solemn oath (v. 20), declaring, as in the presence of God, that what he had said was strictly true, and that he had not in the least falsified in what he had related, which, though it will not justify us in solemn appeals to God upon every occasion, yet shows that, in matters of weight and moment, this may sometimes not only be lawful, but duty. After this he acquaints them that he came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia: having made this short visit to Peter, he returns to his work again. He had no communication at that time with the churches of Christ in Judea, they had not so much as seen his face; but, having heard that he who persecuted them in times past now preached the faith which he once destroyed, they glorified God because of him; thanksgivings were rendered by many unto God on that behalf; the very report of this mighty change in him, as it filled them with joy, so it excited them to give glory to God on the account of it.