

The Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians

CHAPTER 1:1-24

Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead) and all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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 the revelation of Jesus Christ.

For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.

COMMENTARY

By way of introduction, Galatia was a Roman province in what is now southern Turkey. The Apostle Paul established congregations among the Gentiles in Galatia during his first missionary journey -

"And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them [Paul and Barnabas] despitefully and to stone them, they were aware of it and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia [regions of Galatia]; and unto the region that lieth round about. And there they preached the gospel." (Acts 14:5-7)

Paul revisited them on his second missionary journey-

"Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium. Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek. And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia, After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not." (Acts 16:1-7)

And, again on his third journey -

"And when he had landed at Caesarea, and gone up and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch. And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples." (Acts 18:22-23)

The people of Galatia appear to have been an impressionable lot, but they were easily swayed and a bit fickle. They had a long history of Roman idol worship and were versed in mythology. In Acts 14 we read of Paul and Barnabas healing

a lame man, causing the local residents to call Barnabas "Jupiter" and Paul "Mercury", since he was the chief speaker. They even tried to sacrifice ceremonially dressed oxen to the two evangelists, against Paul's protests.

Throughout Paul's missionary activities he was dogged by Judaizers who sought to undermine the message of grace, requiring the Gentile converts to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic Law. They desired Gentile Christianity to be a form of glorified Judaism rather than a covenant of gracious salvation apart from the law.

The battle of theological wits began early in Paul's Christian career. During their first missionary outing, having been specifically chosen out by the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:2), they preached in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia (a region of Galatia). When Paul had finished speaking the Jews departed and the Gentiles besought him to preach the same words to them the following Sabbath, and the whole city came out to hear him. But, the Jews of the city were filled with envy and they spoke against everything Paul declared, contradicting and blaspheming.

The Gentiles heard the word gladly and glorified the word of God, "and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48). Nevertheless, the Jews managed to raise such a fuss, stirring up the chief people of the city, that Paul and Barnabas were expelled.

Later in that same journey, the Jews so enraged the men of Antioch and Iconium that they stoned Paul and left him for dead. So, the theological warfare between Paul and the Judaizers was intense and ongoing.

The purpose of this epistle to the Galatians was to eradicate the doctrinal errors and subversive teaching of the Judaizers. No sooner would Paul leave Galatia than the opposition from Jerusalem would arrive and undermine the grace he taught.

So, with that bit of background, lets dig into this enlightening and uplifting message about the pure and glorious grace of the God who saves.

{1} - Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;)

Saul of Tarsus was a Benjamite. He was probably named after the most famous member of the tribe of Benjamin, Israel's first king. He was a fierce defender of the Jewish faith and a willing persecutor of anyone who opposed it. Let's let him tell us about himself -

"If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more! Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless." (Phil.3:4-6)

"I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And, I persecuted this way [Christianity] unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women, as also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders; from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished." (Acts 22:3-5)

But, it was in the act of this persecuting that Saul underwent one of the most immediate and overwhelming spiritual conversions of any person in the Bible. After attending the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58), he made havoc of the church, helping to scatter the believers out of Jerusalem throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. He went marauding through every house, casting both men and women into prison. But, the apostles remained.

So Saul, puffed up and "breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 9:1) headed for Damascus with letters from the high priests and elders to bind and punish every Christian he could find. But, he never finished his task.

Just as he drew near to the city, a light from heaven knocked him to the ground and he heard a voice ask, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" When Saul asked who spoke, he heard, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest; it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks." Frightened and amazed he wisely asked, "What wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9: 4-6)

Well, Jesus told him to go into the city and there he would be given his instruction. But, when Saul got up, he was blind. For three days he neither ate nor drank, nor saw a thing.

Meanwhile, Jesus was meeting with a fellow named Ananias and told him to go to the house where Saul was staying. Then, Jesus gave Saul a vision of Ananias coming to meet him. But, Saul's infamy was such that Ananias was afraid of him, knowing that he had the authority to bind and persecute Christians. So, the Lord assured him –

"Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:15-16)

So, Ananias went to Judas' house on the street called Straight and laid hands on Saul, calling him "brother." Instantly, Saul received the Holy Spirit, regained his sight, rose up and was baptized in Christ. After a couple days to rebuild his strength, the same man who came to Damascus with threatening letters for the chief priests stood in the synagogue and preached that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

But, Paul's early ministry was an uphill battle. His reputation preceded him. As a result, he had to defend his apostleship. The word "*apostle*" simply means "sent one," or "emissary." The first century church was very familiar with the twelve whom Christ had chosen, although Judas had been replaced with Matthias through a bit of "straw-drawing." Those men who had actually walked and talked with Christ during his earthly ministry were the ones called "apostles" in Scripture.

Still, Paul had been chosen and sent by Jesus, Himself. In a few verses, he will recount his right to apostleship and his ongoing uneasy balance with the other 12. Nevertheless, Paul opens his letter by stating boldly that his apostleship didn't rest in the authority of any man, or group of men, but that he was specifically sent by Christ alone, and God who raised Jesus from the dead.

{2} - And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia:

And, with that phrase, Paul closes the formal introduction to his letter. Now we know who's writing, that he has companions with him, and whom he is writing to. It must have been a joy to the congregations in Galatia to know that Paul and his fellow laborers continued to think of them and care for them.

{3} - Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,

"Grace and peace..."

As Paul pens his greeting to the churches of Galatia, he utilizes one of his favorite phrases, "Grace and peace." He opens his Romans letter the same way - "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ" - as well as both of his Corinthian epistles (1Cor.1:3 and 2Cor.1:2), the Ephesian letter (Eph.1:2), the Philippian letter (Phil.1:2), the Colossian letter (Col.1:2), both letters to Thessalonica (1Thes.1:1 and 2Thes.1:2), both letters to Timothy (1Tim.1:2 and 2Tim.1:2), his letters to Titus (Titus1:4) and Philemon (Phil.1:3).

As well, Peter expressed similar sentiment in each of his epistles, "...grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied" (1Pet.1:2), and "Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord" (2Pet. 1:2).

And, the apostle John used the same phrase in his second short epistle - "Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love." (2John1:3) And in his Revelation, "...Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne." (Rev.1:4)

In fact, of the 27 books that make up the New Testament, the phrase "**grace and peace**" appears in 17 of them. So, let's take the time to dig into this phrase a bit. First, let's get a feel for these words.

"Grace"

This is one of the most important, and often misunderstood, words in New Testament theology. It's been twisted and contorted by modern writers to the point where it no longer resembles its original definition. The Greek word translated "grace" is "*charis*." It has various uses in Scripture, but in combination with "peace" it has a very definite character. We'll get to that in a moment.

The word "*charis*" has both objective and subjective uses. Objectively, it is that which bestows pleasure, or causes one to be looked on favorably. It can be applied to beauty, or the "gracefulness" of a person. Subjectively, it's the kind or friendly disposition of the bestower from whom kindly acts proceed. As such, it describes the "gracious" quality of God when He bestows kindness on undeserving recipients.

A simple, two-word definition of "*charis*" is "undeserved favor" or "unmerited kindness." That's the way Paul is utilizing "grace" in his greetings. Grace is the outpouring of God's highest form of love in doing for sinners that which they neither want done, nor know needs to be done, nor could do for themselves. We receive grace from God when He works on our behalf despite our unworthiness. And, it is by grace that God establishes a relationship between Himself and the undeserving recipients of His loving kindness.

As such, grace cannot be predicated on any worth, works, or merit on the part of the recipient. To whatever degree we insist that we have earned or deserve God's intervention on our behalf, to that degree we are attempting to obligate God and coerce Him to act in response to our actions. In other words, we initiate the relationship and attempt to force God to accept our terms. But, Paul argues against such thinking -

"For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or, who hath been His counsellor? Or, who hath first given to Him and it shall be recompensed unto him again?" (Rom.11:34-35)

In Scripture, grace is held up as the antithesis of the Mosaic Law, personal works and even of debt. Just as the law was incapable of perfecting or saving a man (Heb.10:1), grace covers sinners in the finished work of Christ and removes the judgment of the law. Just as our personal "righteousnesses" are nothing more than bloody, filthy rags (Is.64:6), grace clothes us with Christ's righteousness and removes the stain of our sinful works (Is.1:18). Though we owed an eternal debt we could never begin to pay, which debt required our condemnation and eternal separation from God, grace paid the debt, casting our sins as far as the east is from the west (Ps.103:12) and rewarding us with an inheritance that Christ alone deserves. (Rom. 8:17)

- Grace is **NOT** taking the first step toward the front of the church and Christ meeting us there to take the rest of the walk with us.
- Grace is **NOT** something under the control of TV evangelists who insist that God's graciousness is meted out in direct proportion to your level of giving.
- Grace is **NOT** a special blessing given by the Pope, a minister, an evangelist, a healer or a whole gang of people laying on hands.
- Grace is **NOT** God "looking the other way" so that supposedly converted "carnal Christians" can live like hell and still go to Heaven.
- Grace is **NOT** God's inability to judge or exercise Himself as "a consuming fire" so that all the world will be saved.
- Grace is **NOT** an excuse to presume on God's good nature and continue to sin as though God was required to forgive us.
- Grace is **NOT** pouring out from Heaven like a running faucet waiting us to position ourselves under the stream.

Grace, to be grace, must be completely divorced from merit, earnings, works, any exercise of the flesh or any obligation on God's part. Grace, to be grace, must be utterly and completely an outpouring of God's love for no other reason than His graciousness. Grace, to be grace, cannot be controlled by any church, exercise, creed or theology. Grace, to be grace, must be totally and exclusively...well...**grace!**

"Peace"

The Greek word is "*eirene*" and it appears in every New Testament book except 1John. It denotes a harmonious relationship, friendliness, or freedom from harm. In short, "peace" is the "cessation of enmity," or "the ceasing of against-ness."

Men, by nature, cannot be subject to the will and laws of God - they are at enmity with each other (Rom.8:7). The struggle between two opposing forces can only

be settled when one or the other of the combatants lays down the weapons of his warfare and declares a truce. When a boxer puts down his gloves or throws in the towel, the match is over.

Contrary to modern theology's claim that we sinners are responsible to "choose" God and make peace with our Creator, the Bible says that no man after the flesh would ever come to such a mindset (Is.53:6). The natural rebellion and darkness of our hearts would preclude such a decision. Only God can stop the conflict. Only God could lay down His gloves and spell out the provisions of peace.

"Grace and Peace"

Wherever we see these two works linked together, "grace" always precedes "peace." Without grace there can be no peace. The decision to alleviate the enmity between God and man was a completely gracious act on God's part. And, we rebels by nature, dead in trespasses and sins, were incapable of helping ourselves. So, our standing before God is completely in His hands. The decision to judge or forgive is utterly His (John 5:21).

The pathway to "peace with God" is only by and through His grace. In salvation, grace must always precede peace because only those elect individuals who are the recipients of God's "unmerited favor" will ever rest in the blessed state of peace with the Almighty.

Lastly, Paul declared that this gracious condition of peace is the outworking of both the Father and the Son. Whereas the Father decided the means of salvation, the Son accomplished it. And, both together are responsible for the distribution of grace and the inception of peace.

'Nuff said - moving on.

{4} - Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father:

The "who" here is Christ. In the most gracious act of human history, the Son of God descended from the splendor of eternal glory and took on a tent of human flesh. He willingly allowed Himself to be nailed to a piece of wood and underwent the terror of His Father's wrath. In so doing, He removed our sin and paid our debt, accomplishing peace between the Judge and the formerly guilty sinner.

In Paul's day the Roman Empire ruled the Middle East and their social distortions ran from ritually destroying Christians to every form of sexual abomination. They viewed their Emperors as gods and in the name of power they trampled down every nation within their grasp. The Roman Empire was the sixth of the seven

empires Scripture identifies that would hold Israel in subjection. Paul lived in a very evil age.

Still today, the world is a very messed up place. With each passing day we see the rotten fruit of this wicked world gaining acceptance with the majority and being protected by the laws of the land. Whether it's bombs falling from the sky on civilians, or people uprooted and starving for no reason other than their ethnicity, or kids toting guns and bombs to school, or parades to celebrate every type of perversion and sub-group of "diversity," or television programs gaining ratings and advertising dollars by broadcasting every form of human indecency and the "wrath of men," the world continues down the slippery slope of rebellious sin.

But, in accordance with God's own will and positive decree, the death of Christ was designed to give us hope and peace in the knowledge that the evil world will not prevail. We will be delivered and Christ will execute judgment against the rulers of darkness who have exercised authority on planet earth.

In fact, by His grace, the "Prince of Peace" will bring lasting peace to this evil world when He sets up His throne in Jerusalem -

"At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem. Neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart."
(Jer.3:17)

The deliverance that Christ purchased at Calvary was more than just the salvation of individual men. It was the redemption of earth. Just as the ground was cursed for Adam's sake, bringing up thorns and thistles (Gen.3:17-18), the planet will be redeemed, remade and restored by the power of the One who purchased eternal perfection (Rev.21:1). All nature will be changed (Is.11) and the whole of creation will respond in loving obedience to the Creator of all things.

That, by the way, is how we Christians can deal with "this present evil world." We know that it won't last. We know that our Redeemer will reign victorious over all. We know that the clock is ticking and Christ will return as King of kings and Lord of lords. By astounding, powerful, overarching grace, the Prince of Peace will establish His kingdom of peace "which shall never be destroyed" (Dan.2:44).

{5} - To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Amen and amen.

God will not share His glory with anyone. No man will presume to glorify himself under God's dominion. Only God has the right and the power to "deck

(Himself)...with majesty and excellency and array (Him)self with glory and beauty" (Job 40:10).

The glory of God is an everlasting glory that no one can ascend to and no one can partake of. Even the planets flee the glory of God and the stars are not pure in His sight (Job 25:5). God dwells in the light that no man approaches (1Tim.6:16).

Yet, from that pinnacle of eternal splendor, God sent His Son to be a propitiation for unclean, unworthy sinners - like us! The act of ultimate grace resulted in ultimate peace, and it will all redound to the ultimate glory of God our Savior.

The first five verses of this letter started like so many of Paul's epistles, full of gracious hope and an immediate focus on what's important - the atonement of Christ and the glory of God. But, that's about as far as he got before he dispensed with the "niceties" and came barrel housing down on them.

The Judaizers had taken their toll. A false version of the gospel had begun to circulate which required Gentile converts to adhere to the Mosaic Law, particularly to circumcision. But, that teaching created spiritual dilemmas that Paul knew he had to resist in the most forceful, dogmatic way. He knew that if the new converts began to look to their fleshly works for their justification before God they were in eternal peril. So, for their own good, and for the sanctity of the pure gospel, Paul began an all-out assault against such thinking.

{6} -] marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel:

On each of his journeys through Galatia, Paul preached the same gospel of free and sovereign grace. The all-sufficient grace of Christ was the core of Paul's message and the reason for his tireless zeal. He had been both an example and a messenger of mercy to them. But, something inexplicable had taken place.

Paul was astonished that they had lost their grip so quickly. After he had labored to establish them in the faith, the Galatian churches were drifting away from Paul's message, and from Paul himself. And, they had embraced another message that was going under the pretense of being the gospel, but which was, in fact, a false gospel.

There's an interesting bit of word play happening in the Greek. When Paul referred to "another gospel" in this verse he used the word "*heteron*" which means not only another numerically, but also another qualitatively.

In other words, the message that influenced the Galatians was not only a secondary gospel, but a completely different gospel than the one he had

preached. While it may have had similar elements, it was completely inferior to the original.

And, Paul's language makes the contrast clear - the lesser gospel they had embraced had effectively "removed" them from the "grace of Christ."

{7} - Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

Now, this time when Paul said "Which is not another..." he used a different word - "allo" - meaning another of the same kind just declared by someone else. It's possible for many people to preach the genuine gospel in many different ways according to their different style, gifts and culture. But, the core substance of the gospel remains the same.

So, Paul's flow of discussion goes like this: "I am astounded that you could be so quickly dissuaded from the true gospel of the grace of Christ - which I preached to you repeatedly - and that you've embraced a completely different, inferior message disguised as the gospel. They are not one and the same coming from two different sources. In fact, the other message is patently dangerous."

The other gospel - the lesser gospel - was a distortion of the true gospel. It was a perversion - a "turning upside down" - of the words of life. And, the perversion was no mistake; it was the product of men whose purpose was to trouble, upset and overturn the Gentile converts, proselytizing them to the Judaistic form.

But, the gospel is the gospel is the gospel. No matter who preaches it or who undermines it, it remains true to itself and remains the only means of salvation and reconciliation between man and God.

Still, be careful how you handle it, and don't mess it up...

{8} - 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.

In approaching this verse, let's start with what Paul is not saying. He is not posing the possibility that either he or an angel would (or could) preach a qualitatively different gospel from the one he originally preached.

What Paul is saying is that the truth of the gospel supercedes any person, any creature or any authority save God. No matter who preaches in Heaven or Earth, if they stray from the true gospel of grace through Christ, there is only one appropriate reaction - "let him be accursed."

That's strong language, but the English term "*accursed*" doesn't do justice to the depth and power of Paul's words. In the Old Testament God had specific regulations regarding the spread of false worship. Whenever it got a foothold in Israel, it was to be wiped out completely, and no vestiges left standing. God required such a complete dissolution of foreign gods and adulterous worship that the act of destroying the artifacts of false religion became a form of sacrifice devoted to utter destruction for God's sake.

"If thou shalt hear say in one of thy cities, which the LORD thy God hath given thee to dwell there, saying, Certain men, the children of Belial, are gone out from among you, and have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which ye have not known; Then shalt thou inquire, and make search, and ask diligently; and, behold, if it be truth, and the thing certain, that such abomination is wrought among you; Thou shalt surely smite the inhabitants of that city with the edge of the sword, destroying it utterly, and all that is therein, and the cattle thereof, with the edge of the sword. And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire the city, and all the spoil thereof every whit, for the LORD thy God: and it shall be an heap for ever; it shall not be built again. And there shall cleave nought of the cursed thing to thine hand: that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger, and shew thee mercy, and have compassion upon thee, and multiply thee, as he hath sworn unto thy fathers; When thou shalt hearken to the voice of the LORD thy God, to keep all his commandments which I command thee this day, to do that which is right in the eyes of the LORD thy God." (Deut.13:12-18)

This destruction of perverse worship extended to every relationship within Israel and the penalty for advocating foreign gods was always destruction of the guilty party for God's glory.

"If thy brother, the son of thy mother, or thy son, or thy daughter, or the wife of thy bosom, or thy friend, which is as thine own soul, entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods, which thou hast not known, thou, nor thy fathers; Namely, of the gods of the people which are round about you, nigh unto thee, or far off from thee, from the one end of the earth even unto the other end of the earth; Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: But thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people. And thou shalt stone him with stones, that he die; because he hath sought to thrust thee away from the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. And all Israel shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness as this is among you." (Deut.13:6-11)

Now, the Greek word that Paul used, translated "accursed," is "*anathema*." It's an interesting word. It normally refers to a consecrated gift, given by a vow or in fulfillment of a promise, which is given over to destruction for God's sake. It carries the weight of the Old Testament burning and destroying of unholy things for God's glory. So, in the New Testament it has the residual meaning of being given up to destruction, or being accursed. That's how it's used in 1Cor.12:3 -

"Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed..."

In 1Cor.16:22, the KJV doesn't even bother to translate it -

"If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema. Maranatha."

So, now we're getting a feel for this word. Any man (or even angel) who distorts the gospel of grace in Christ is to be turned over for destruction by God for God's own glory. He is advocating a different gospel, portraying a different Christ, which is tantamount to idolatry and the curse of God - resulting in his complete destruction - rests on him.

Or, as I said before, don't mess it up! And, just in case we think Paul's language is overly combative or that he actually meant to say something a little more sympathetic, he repeats it!

{9} - *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.*

I can just hear the relativistic modern preacher saying, "Man, Paul! Lighten up, dude. I mean, what difference does it make if we mess with the details as long as we get people to make a profession?"

But, both Paul and God take a very dim view of reforming their message in order to make it fit our theological hobbyhorses. In fact, "adding to" or "taking away" can get you filed under the "anathema" column.

Still, I have to ask --- does anyone heed this warning? How many people take these words seriously? If Christ paid our complete, sufficient price to procure our salvation and He "perfected forever" those that are His, then who (???) has the right to lay a guilt-trip on us and set up standards or rules as a wedge between us and God?

If Christ is our all-sufficient, once-for-all sacrifice, accepted before the Eternal Throne of God as full payment to purchase His elect bride, then who (???) is arrogant enough to add to the gospel of grace their personal set of criteria by which we're supposed to prove ourselves worthy to enter?

Allow me an obvious example. How many times have we heard, "Jesus has done all He can do and now it's up to you to complete the transaction and choose Him."? Where is that in Scripture? But, I've heard it - in one form or another - dozens of times. Christ has finished His work, but now you have to add your work to it in order to validate His work. That's not the gospel. That's a perverted form of the gospel.

But, are we willing to join Paul and say, "Let those preachers be anathema"?

Paul would.

{ 10 } - 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.

That's the precipice we all balance on. Paul stood on God's authority when he declared that those who twist the gospel should be given up to destruction for God's glory. "After all," says he, "Who am I trying to persuade here? God?" Certainly not. God feels the same way. Paul was trying to persuade men to turn from the destructive teaching, but in so doing he risked offending and angering other men.

"So," Paul asks, "Do I seek to please men?" Nope. If Paul were out to please men he would have to admit that he was no longer Christ's bondsman. As it was, Paul was fully given over to defending the gospel of grace regardless of whether his defense offended the purveyors of the perverted gospel.

Tell the truth. Defend the truth. Let the chips fall where they may. God's word is worth it.

{ 11 } - 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 the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The core of Paul's defense rested not in himself, his intellect, his sterling Hebraic background, or his relationship with men of renown. While the Judaizers preached after the long-held traditions of men, Paul's teaching was neither "after man" nor did he learn it "of man." It was neither man-made nor man-taught. Paul learned the Gospel of Christ from its author, Christ the Lord.

The unspoken threat underlying Paul's words is: If you're rejecting my teaching your rejecting Christ's own teaching. If you pervert my words, you're perverting Christ's words.

{13-14} - For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

Paul was uniquely gifted and specifically chosen to link the Abrahamic Covenant to the New Covenant (as we'll see in Chapter 3) and proclaim the coming of Messiah to the Jewish nation. But, he was also uniquely educated in the ways of Grecian culture and Roman society (being a Roman citizen) to bring the proclamation of grace to the Gentiles. Being fluent in both Hebrew and Greek, he could proclaim the mysteries of God to Jew and Gentile.

Paul often cited his notorious past, not shying away from his infamy, in order to proclaim the electing grace of God. In fact, Paul's words here are an echo of the words he spoke in Jerusalem after he was arrested for a riot in the temple.

"Men, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. And now why tarriest

thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance; And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him. And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live." (Acts 22:1-22)

So, in order to convince the Galatians of his utter change of disposition, his genuine conversion and complete repentance, he again emphasized his previous dedication to historic Judaism, even to the destruction of Christian professors.

But... (Don't you just love that word?)

{15} - But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, But, when it pleased God...

The all-too-often overlooked secret of life is that everything happens in accordance with God's foreknowledge and determinate counsel. And, every event that occurs in the realm of the Sovereign occurs according to His good pleasure. Things happen when - and only when - it pleases God to have them happen. Not before, not after.

"Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure." (Is. 46:9-10)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. 1:3-6)

...who separated me from my mother's womb...

There are two viable interpretations of this phrase. Paul may be saying that his very birth was in the hands of God, and his life would have been an impossibility had the King of Life not been present to bless the activity of his natural birth.

Or, Paul may be saying that God had chosen him from the moment of his birth to be a sanctified, separated vessel specifically set aside for God's use. Despite appearances to the contrary, Paul was always in God's will and intentions, awaiting the day when God would intervene in the circumstances of his life and change his direction.

I tend to lean toward the second interpretation, though the first is certainly valid. But, in keeping with Paul's flow of thought, this phrase seems to emphasize that even though he had a well-deserved reputation as an enemy of Christianity, he was nevertheless the recipient of God's unerring grace, determined for him from before the foundations of the world.

When Paul was instructed to go to Ananias' home after he was blinded, Christ spoke to Ananias to prepare for Paul's arrival -

"Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake." (Acts 9:13-16)

In the mind of God, predetermined in the counsels of Heaven, Paul the Christian-hating, legalistic Benjamite was a chosen vessel to preach the good news of Christ. But, He would also suffer under the fear his reputation had garnered among believers, and the hatred and alienation of his own people and religion.

...and called me out by his grace...

Paul's call was the quintessential "effectual call." Paul was not invited to "make Jesus his Lord and Savior" or to "choose Christ." The voice from Heaven never invited Paul to make a decision or come forward and "say the sinner's prayer." Paul was not told that if he would take the first step toward Jesus, the Lord would meet him and take the rest of the walk with him. None of the foolishness that characterizes modern "conversion" methodology occurred when Jesus called Paul.

The "call of Christ" is the call of King, and His word - the same word that spoke the universe into existence - speaks the reality of faith into cold, dead hearts. And notice, by the way, that there was nothing whatsoever in Paul's religion, ethics, motives or actions that would have recommended him to God. He would

not, did not, and could not have chosen eternal life in Christ. He was too full of hatred toward Christ and anger against believers to have suddenly given mental ascent to the truth of Christ. "...neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." (Mat. 7:18b)

So, what Paul would not and could not do, God did for His own reasons and for His own good pleasure. The Creator of the universe spoke to a member of His creation and recreated him on the spot. The powerful call of the Almighty rendered Paul incapable of resistance, turning him from his own threats and wrath toward the God of peace and reconciliation. And, God did it as an exercise of grace.

Grace is the reason for conversion. Grace is the impetus behind faith. Grace leads to repentance. Grace is the outgrowth of God's good pleasure, working irresistibly whenever God calls to His chosen vessels.

{16a} - To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen;

Paul was "separated" - set aside for God's exclusive use - so that Christ would be preached in a dramatic and irrefutable way. When one of the church's fiercest persecutors suddenly preached the doctrine of Christ, especially under torture and threat of death, even the most hardened naysayer had to admit that something inexplicable had occurred.

But, there was also a purposeful mission behind Paul's conversion. The original apostles who had walked and talked with Christ during his earthly ministry were all Jews. Consequently, they held to the early church theory that Christianity was an exclusively Jewish, or at least Israelitish, religion. Just as God had historically chosen the nation of Israel and put His name on them, early Jewish converts recognized Christ's proclamation of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah. And, since Jeremiah spoke specifically of "the house of Israel and with the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31), they held that the New Covenant in Christ was the natural outgrowth of God's exclusive love for Israel.

But, Paul's ministry was designed to take the promise of salvation by grace through faith to the Gentiles, to the heathen, to those who "are no people" (Deut. 32:21, Rom. 10:19), who have no association with the historic covenants made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As a consequence, Paul met with fierce, and sometimes violent, opposition from all sides.

Now let's put all this back into context as we build toward Paul's conclusion. Starting from verse 11, he began making a case for his apostleship. Inasmuch as he was seeking to please God and not men, he asserted that the "good news" he preached was not taught to him by any man. Rather, he received it as a revelation from Christ Himself. As proof of that fact, giving credibility to both his

message and his apostleship, Paul reminded them of his deeply rooted Jewish past and vicious persecution of the church. But, the grace of God called him and determined that he would carry the message of Christ to the heathen nations.

So, confident in both his message and God-given purpose -

{ 16b } - ...immediately | conferred not with flesh and blood:

Paul needed no man to confirm his ministry. There was no man-made authority and no Christ-centered counsel that either would or could add credence to Paul's claim. He simply went forth preaching. He did what his Master called him to do and didn't worry about the ordination or recommendation of any other men.

No sooner was Paul's sight restored under the hands of Ananias than he was baptized, had a bite to eat, and visited with fellow believers at Damascus. Then -

"And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God. But all that heard him were amazed and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests? But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ." (Acts 9:20-22)

Of course, that kind of sudden shift in purpose will get you bucket loads of trouble. After a few days the local Jews decided to kill him. They stayed at the gates night and day waiting for him to leave the city so they could wipe him out completely. But, in the good providence of God, Paul knew of their plan and the local disciples let him down over the wall in a basket.

But, without the blessing of any man or council of men, Paul leapt immediately into the task of proclaiming the Lordship of Christ, needing no man's approval.

{ 17 } - Neither went | up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but | went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

So independent was this amazing upstart that he didn't feel the need to confer with the apostles at Jerusalem. And, true to his conviction of apostleship, he refers to the others as apostles who simply received that title ahead of him. They were on an equal plane, all chosen and sent by Christ. But, Paul's direction came later than the others - "as of one born out of due time" (1Cor.15:8).

Instead, he ventured into the deserts of Arabia and eventually went back to Damascus where his ministry had begun.

{18-19} - Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

Paul's ministry to the Gentiles continued three years before he'd even met one of the original 12 apostles. James - the brother of Jesus, called "James the less" - is never spoken of in the gospels as a believer or follower of Christ's. His conversion apparently occurred after the resurrection. Often in the gospels we read of Jesus' sort of "inner circle" of Peter, John, and James. However, that James - the brother of John - was killed very early in church history.

"Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And, he killed James the brother of John with the sword." (Acts 12:1-2)

So, for the balance of the book of Acts, the references to James are to Jesus' brother, a devout Jew, who became an elder in the Jerusalem church.

This brief encounter between Paul, Peter and James isn't recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Apparently nothing very earth-shattering took place in this initial meeting. In fact, the first real council between Paul and Barnabas with Peter, John and James, resulting in an accord between Jewish and Gentile ministries, didn't take place until more than 17 years after Paul's initial conversion (Acts 2:1).

Now, Paul has a point - a very good point, I might say - for building up this history. He's leading up to that Jerusalem council, the conflict, and the accord. And, from that platform he will reassert the gospel of grace without works. But, that's getting ahead of ourselves.

{20} - Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

What else can I say? Paul had every confidence that not only was God witness to this tale, but He approved it and upheld it. And, as Paul would write elsewhere:

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom.8:31b)

{21-24} - Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: But they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me.

After Paul's dramatic conversion and encounter with Christ, he immediately began preaching in Damascus. For the next three years he spent his time in Arabia and Damascus before first journeying to Jerusalem. But, when he arrived and tried to join himself to the disciples of that area, they were naturally afraid of him, given his reputation. But, there was a fellow there in Jerusalem named Barnabas who took Paul to meet the apostles. Paul tells us that during that brief visit he saw only Peter and James. But, that meeting would have been impossible without the intervention of this man who would become one of Paul's closest associates.

Barnabas was a Levite from the country of Cyprus. He had been converted by the preaching of Peter and John. His original name was Joses, but the apostles surnamed him Barnabas (Acts 4:36). He was one of the early church members who sold their land and laid the money at the apostles' feet. So, being close to the apostles, he lived up to his name "The Son of Consolation" when he brought Paul to meet them. Apparently, Barnabas had heard of Paul's conversion experience, whether first or secondhand. He recounted the details to Peter and James and told how Paul had preached Christ boldly at Damascus (Acts 9:27). During the 15-day stay with Peter, Paul argued with the Greeks in the area, defending Christ. But, they sought to kill him. So, when the Jerusalem brethren knew that Paul's life was in danger they took him to Caesarea and from there he crossed the Mediterranean Sea to Tarsus in Cilicia - his home.

As a consequence, Paul remained unknown by face to the churches in Judaea, since his visit was cut short and was confined to Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Jerusalem believers had been scattered as the persecution arose around the time of Stephen's stoning. They traveled as far as Phoenicia, north of Samaria; the island of Cyprus; and Antioch in Northern Syria. To this point, the gospel message had been preached primarily to Israel, and these believers preached to no one except other scattered Jews, despite their travels into Gentile territories (Acts. 11:19). However, some of the men from Cyprus and Cyrene arrived in Antioch and preached to the Greeks. The hand of the Lord was on them and a great number believed (Acts 11:20). The news of God's outpouring of grace on these Gentiles traveled to the church in Jerusalem. Wanting a firsthand report, the leaders at Jerusalem sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived, Barnabas rejoiced and exhorted the new converts to cling to the Lord with all their heart (Acts 11:22-23). Then, the Scripture records this wonderful account of the man Barnabas -

"For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith; and much people was added unto the Lord." (Acts 11:24)

But, Barnabas realized that he was just a short boat trip across the Mediterranean from Tarsus, where Paul was residing, and he decided to go look

him up. And, when he found Paul, he brought him back to Antioch and the two of them stayed there for an entire year, teaching the new church. And, it was there at Antioch that the disciples were for the first time called "Christians" (Acts.11:26).

So, Paul's reputation spread and was widely published in the church that the man who had once persecuted them and laid them to waste was now used powerfully by God to spread the good news of salvation through His Son. And, the testimony of Paul's conversion became (as it is, today) a witness to the power and sovereign grace of the Almighty.