

Paul, God's Man

Galatians 1:1–12

Last week we introduced an airplane view of the book of Galatians. This book divides a little differently than Paul normally writes a letter. Normally his letters just divide into two parts—what God's done for us in Christ, and then what we should do for God since we are now in Christ. Saint Galatians is not two parts but a three part division of Paul's letter to the church at Galatians. We saw the big picture last Wednesday night and tonight we're going to get in one of those Brazilian canoes with a taildragger, and we're going to go real slow through the book of Galatians. But it is our goal to finish this fall, early winter, the book of Galatians. We're calling the whole book freedom in Christ, or free in Christ, but we're going to title this lesson Paul, God's Man. I don't think anyone would refute that. We all know who's writing this letter to the church at Galatia, a man by the name of Paul. Let's read the first 12 verses. Now I realize verse 12 starts into a new paragraph so I'm not going to finish all of that paragraph because there's no way we're going to get that far, but I just want you to see how Paul begins his letter to the church at Galatia because it's going to be different than the way he normally opens his letters.

Scripture

"Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is

another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ"

We're not going to go deep into who Paul is here because in the next couple of lessons Paul's going to remind us of his testimony. You know that we meet Paul (but he's known as Saul) in the book of Acts when a man by the name of Stephen, one of the first deacons of the church, is stoned to death. The people who were in authority doing the stoning laid their garments at Saul's feet, and we know that to be a cultural sign that Saul had given the authority for them to take Stephen's life. Wow... We have this picture of Jesus seated at the right hand throne of God making intercession for us, but in Acts chapter 7, Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw Jesus "standing" at the Father's right hand side. I don't know what you're thinking, but I'm just wondering if when Jesus was seated at the Father's right hand side, maybe He stood up in honor of Stephen? Then after seeing that last thing before they took his life, he literally went into the presence of the Lord.

When Acts chapter 8 opens after Stephen's stoning, Saul is on a rampage and he's literally going after the church. He's trying to destroy the church. Then all of a sudden, we tear away from Saul and we see the gospel going out into the desert. Then when Acts chapter 9 starts, we get back back to this guy named Saul. He's got letters from the Jewish high priest to go to Damascus and to literally take whoever he finds that's part of "the Way,"

the church, and he has the authority to take men and women and place them in prison. Now they're on the road to Damascus, and you know what happens, he meets Jesus. A shining light blinds the people who are with him, and Saul hears Jesus speaking to him, "'Saul, Saul, Why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?'" And He said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.'" I think you and I believe it was at that moment he comes to surrender his life to Jesus.

Now, we know that he's taken into the city and he's staying in a house on Straight street. Then the Lord appears to a guy named Ananias, tells him to go to Straight street because there's a guy in the house, his name is Saul, and Ananias says...*what?* Do you blame him? You're sending me where ...to who? *Hey, I've heard of that guy! God, do you know he's already got letters right now that if I go in there and expose myself I can be placed in prison?* Yet the Lord shares with Ananias His work in Saul's life, his call, and how his life has changed, and that he's waiting for Ananias to show up because when he lays his hands on Saul, he's going to receive his sight back. Now, it's going to be later after he makes one of his missionary journeys with a guy named Barnabas that the name starts being changed from Saul to Paul. But he's not going to call himself Saul here as he is writing to the church, he's going to call himself Paul, and as he does so many times, he introduces himself to the church as an apostle.

Now, the word, apostle, basically means a sent one. It was a person who was set apart with authority to represent someone. We know that when Jesus started His ministry, He chose twelve men to be His representatives out of His disciples and He set them apart to be apostles. We realized that one of them wasn't real, one of them was a devil and we find out later who that was—Judas Iscariot. I find it amazing that the other eleven ever realized who Judas was. I mean, he got elected to be the treasurer of the church! Jesus starts His church...I'm of the opinion Jesus started the church during His earthly ministry, I do not believe the church was started on the Day of Pentecost. Now I think the church was anointed with the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost, but I believe the church was already

there, and who was the treasurer of the early church? Who was the treasurer of the early disciples? It was Judas. Now I don't know about you, but normally when you pick somebody who's a treasurer, that's somebody who's trustworthy. That's a person of integrity so I don't think anybody had a clue. No one questioned it but Jesus always knew, and we see Jesus always trying to reach out to Judas. We understand what happens at the end; Judas betrays Jesus and Jesus gets crucified. What does the church do in the beginning of the book of Acts? They have to choose another apostle. They cast lots and that twelfth apostle is chosen. Now, some people believe the church messed up and should not have chosen a twelfth apostle. That literally should have waited because God had already ordained for this guy named Paul to be the twelfth apostle. We're not going to go into that, but just know when Paul identifies himself as an apostle. He's identifying himself as one of the ones who represented Christ, and there was very few that carried this name apostle. We happen to be in a church today that believes that apostolic succession has ended, so there are no apostles today. Now, when I go to Brazil with this they're going to struggle with that because you have to understand that there are many churches on the bank of the Amazon River who have apostles, and there are a lot of people who are drawn to those men who claim to be apostles.

So Paul identifies himself as an apostle, and I want you to watch this because he does it for the first time in a negative way in Galatians. See, Paul's always been positive about being an apostle in his other letters. Let's go to Romans 1:1, "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God." Now turn to 1st Corinthians, chapter 1, "Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus." Now go to his second letter. When he writes to the early churches, he always identifies himself this way, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Now, let's skip Galatians and go to Ephesians, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Now if we turn to the next letter, which is the Philippian letter, watch this, he doesn't identify himself as an apostle because he's co-writing this with Timothy and they just call themselves

servants, no apostle. Now let's look at Colossians, verse 1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God." Do you hear his standard way? He states it positive...I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God...it's positive. Now in Thessalonians he does not identify himself as an apostle. Let's go to 1st Timothy 1, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus [not by the will of God here] by the *command* of God our Savior and of Christ our hope." Now look at 2nd Timothy, "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus." Now look at Titus, "Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior." Wow! One more Philemon, "Paul, a prisoner for Jesus Christ" There he's just a prisoner.

Now let's look back at Galatians. It's negative here it's not positive, which makes me stop to think why would he change the standard way? He wrote a letter to the church. Why didn't he just say Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God as he normally did, or the command of God...something's going on. Now my first thought would be that Paul's being attacked so he's defending himself. We see that in his second letter to the Corinthian church, he's being attacked so he defends himself from time to time. I don't think that's why he's doing it here. I don't think it's Paul that's being attacked, I think it's the gospel that's being attacked. Because if you're Paul and you're being attacked, you can stay positive and say, 'Paul and apostle of Christ Jesus, by the will of God.' That's pretty plain...you take on me, you take it on God's man. But he doesn't do it that way here so I want you to feel the weight of this. Something's under attack and it's not just Paul. He is under attack, but he's being attacked not because he's Paul, he's being attacked because of the gospel and the gospel's under attack. So Paul's representing the gospel. Paul brought the gospel to these people. So if you're going to prove the gospel that Paul's

preaching is false, you prove Paul's false and you tie them together. Does that make sense? I mean, people still do that today. You want to tear somebody's principles and beliefs down, you tear them down. This is about the gospel and what Paul's going to tell us is it's God gospel, it's not man's gospel. So the first thing he tells us is that him being an apostle is not from men nor through man. Paul's not an apostle because somebody in the church picked him out, thought he was gifted, thought he was anointed, thought he was God's man and gave him this title of being an apostle.

Now if we were to study Acts chapter 1, one of the things the first church did while they were waiting for the anointing of God's Holy Spirit was to realize Judas betrayed Jesus. Remember, Jesus told them to go back, wait, don't go out as my witnesses until the Holy Spirit comes upon you. Then when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you're going to go out and you're going to be a powerful witness. You're going to start in Jerusalem. You're going to go to Judea, you're going to go to Samaria, you're going to go to the uttermost parts world, but don't start, don't go until. And one of the things the church did when they met together was they realized, whoa, Judas betrayed Jesus. He took his life, therefore we need twelve so they cast lots to choose the twelfth person. Now, the book of Proverbs teaches in that day people believe that the casting of the lots was under the sovereignty of God. You realize that, right? So if you wanted to know God's will, you cast a lot. I mean, how many of you would be comfortable getting ready to make a decision, so you pull out a quarter and say okay, God, heads I do it, tails I don't; you control this quarter. I don't know if we're there or not... Can you imagine being those two guys that they're casting lots and everybody believes, leaves them casting the lot. God was in control of it. But who did God use to choose? He used the church. So there's a sense in which that twelfth one was chosen by God, but through the church.

In Galatians, Paul's making it clear here that he's not an apostle because of man, not from man nor through man. How would you distinguish this? I mean, is Paul really trying to split a hair here between not from man nor

through man? Or is he just using prepositions here to let us know beyond a shadow of a doubt that him being apostle is not from man? That's what he's trying to do, and then he just tells us, "but through Jesus Christ" So Paul's an apostle, not because of man's choosing, but he's an apostle because of Jesus' choosing and God the Father's choosing. Wow! Normally he just says I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God. I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ according to the command of God the Father. So he identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus, but he gives credit for him being the apostle to God the Father. Here, he doesn't use the adjective apostle of Jesus through God or by God; it's through Jesus and God our Father. He's an apostle according to the Son, and he's an apostle according to the Father, and he links Jesus and God together, and that the reason he's an apostle is because of them. Amen!

Now, this in no way applies to being an apostle, but I don't know if this is where we got what we got as a Baptist church. I grew up in a Baptist church, and if you were going to be a pastor of a Baptist church you were supposed to be a pastor because of God not because of yourself. Baptist churches did not want men in the pulpit who wanted to be there on their own, or because they were mama chosen or deacon chosen, or granddaddy chosen; they wanted a person, like Paul, to have a clear testimony that the only reason they're doing what they're doing is because they got a call from God. Now, being a pastor is not on the same level as being an apostle, everybody hear me say that. Let me just remind you that if it was left up to me, I would've never done what I'm doing right now, in pastoring a church. Paul and I kind of have that one thing in common together, he had his life planned, I had my life planned. I wouldn't have persecuted at the church, I loved the church like he loved being a Jew. I believe with all of my heart I would have been a deacon. I think I would have been a good deacon. I think I would have been a Sunday school teacher, probably would've never been a worship leader because I can't sing. But I was going to be a farmer, that's who I wanted to be.

I'm telling you, I understand Paul when he's going to tell us this...me being a pastor is not through anybody, it's only through God. Now praise the Lord, God didn't have to shine a light on me going down the road, but me and God did have pretty good argument for about three years. I will never forget as long as I live walking out of a church service, going down the steps of Ledbetter Baptist church, and Saint Evie, the only lady in our church who was called a saint—I've told you this story before, right? See, I was raised in a church where we were all saved sinners except Miss Evie, she was Saint Evie. We would go to church and I would see Saint Evie at church sometimes, but most of the time when I saw Saint Evie, she was on her porch. She was the second to the last house before you got to the church, and when we'd be driving to church my dad would say, "You wave at Saint Eve," and me and Sis in the backseat would wave at Saint Evie. We would go to church, church would get over, and we would head back home and Saint Evie would still be on the porch. Because we were on the opposite side now, Mama would say, "You wave at Saint Evie," and we would wave at Saint Evie. I had this thought that I knew why she was a saint. She's so old she couldn't sin if she wanted to! But I will never forget God confirming through her His call on my life, when as a 16-year-old boy, I was coming out of church and she was on the step, I was hurrying down the step with the other boys and she looked at me and she said, "You know, God's calling you to preach." How could somebody know something like that; come on, be real? God and I fought for three years and I lost, but in losing, I won. I cannot imagine what my life would have been had God not called me to do what I have gotten to do.

So hear these words Paul's saying, I am who I am; I'm God's man. And when he's talking about being God's man, he's Jesus's man and God's man, but he's not man's man. So this is important for the church to hear him say this because what he's fighting for here is the soul of the gospel, and this is an important fight to the Apostle Paul. Now look what he's going to say about God the Father "who raised Him from the dead." Wow. If you read the book of Acts, if you study the Apostle Paul, man, the early church just

wouldn't leave Him in the ground. They just didn't leave Him on the cross, they had Him resurrected. Amen? The resurrection gives validity to the death of Jesus, you know that, right?

I was in seminary at Southern, and I was in the Life of Christ class. We would study under the professor, and then we were all divided into little study groups. At the end of the semester, my group was supposed to give a report on the resurrection. I will never forget, Dr. Blevins walked in and our group was supposed to be studied and ready, and Dr. Blevins just said this to us, "Guys, they just found the bones of Jesus in a Palestinian tomb. They have done the DNA evidence and we know He wasn't raised from the dead. Does that shake your faith?" Now at the time, Southern had a great reputation for its social program so we had a lot of people that was coming to Southern, not to pastor or preach or to teach the Bible, but to be in social work. So I didn't know firsthand some of these people that I'm sitting in a group with. But we started around our circle and the first three guys said, "No, it would not shake my faith." Then they got to me and I looked at Dr. Blevins and I said, "Now I want to make sure I'm understanding this right. You're telling me they discovered the actual bones of Jesus in a Palestine tomb and beyond a shadow of a doubt, it's His?" He said, "That's right." I said, "Yeah, that shakes my faith. I'm quitting pastoring. I'm not going back to church." They went to the next guy and he kind of said what I said, and then the next three guys kind of wavered. Dr. Blevins didn't say a word, he just got up and started out the door. I said, "Dr. Blevins," and he turned around. He said, "What Ricky?" I said, "Dr. Blevins, I just heard that they have discovered the actual bones of Jesus in a Palestinian tomb. They've done the DNA research on it, and it's His bones. Does that shake your faith?" Do you know what he said? He said, "Yeah. I'm resigning as a professor of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary." Guys, there was a literal resurrection. Paul would write to the church of Corinth and say if He's not resurrected, we are of most men pitiful, because what that means is we're still in our sin. Amen? So Paul wants us to hear how important the resurrection is to the gospel. He

mentions resurrection before he mentions death. Wow! Now remember, he's already preached to them, they know the gospel. But when he's identifying who he is as an apostle, it's through Jesus and God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead.

Now look at this next part, "...and all the brothers who are with me." So there were some brothers with him and they're in on this letter that he's writing and sending to the churches of Galatia. Now, I want to be really, really careful here, I want to make sure you understand this. I've been introduced to this thought that this word, Galatia, can refer to the cultural people of that area. They were Galatians, they had some mannerisms that made them stick out from other people. Or, this term, Galatia, referred to a geographical location where people lived, which is Galatia. I've thought a little bit more on this, and sometimes in America we talk about living in the south, and living in the south can mean a geographical location in the United States of America, which is in the southern part of the country. But sometimes people will say "I live in the South" to refer to being a Southerner, and they're using that term to distinguish that they're just a little bit different from some people who live in other parts of the country. Is that fair? Now, I'll be really, really careful here, but sometimes people in the South talk about people in the North and they call them Northerners. Now that can refer to where you live, geographical, or it can refer to your culture. I get tickled at hearing some people who live in the South, when they go up North, they talk about not being able to go to a restaurant and buy sweet tea, because evidently Northerners don't drink sweet tea. That's a cultural thing, and scholars tell us this is how Galatia is being used. So you've got a group of scholars who believe Paul's writing to the Church of Galatia, and he's writing to the Northerners. I mean, you've got some people who live in the North who wouldn't consider themselves a Northerner, but the Northerner was the people who had the culture of the North.

Others believe that this is just a geographical location. I don't know that it matters, but I'm going to go with it's a geographical location. He's writing

to a group of people who live in a geographical area called Galatia, and the area that he's writing to is probably the churches that he founded on his first missionary journey in Acts 13 and 14. Now, if your favorite Bible commentary has it northern Galatia, I'm fine with that. I don't think it matters. Now the main reason I believe that is because the primary people giving the trouble here had a big understanding of the Old Testament and the law. If I can use the term Galatia, culturally? No, they were pagans! Jews didn't have anything to do with those people. But in southern Galatia, yeah, you had the Galatians there, but when this came under Rome as a province, I think in 25 BC, there are many, many other people living in this countryside called southern Galatia. Now, if you got a modern map out, this is present day Turkey. If you go with the cultural term, it would be referring to the north part of Turkey, but if you go with what I believe, that it's a geographical location, it's talking more about the southern part of what we would call modern day Turkey. Does it matter? No. It's written to a group of people where Paul preached the gospel. Now, most scholars believe this is the first letter Paul wrote. So if this is the first letter Paul wrote, it makes me believe he probably wrote it to some of those churches on that first missionary journey, not those churches that were started on the third missionary journey where he was further up north. Does that make sense? So those two pieces of evidence lead me to believe it's southern Galatia.

Now watch what he says, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." When Paul wrote the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians, he basically talked about but for the grace of God go I, you remember that? How many of us could say that? You see some people doing some really wrong things and you look at your own heart and realize that if it wasn't God's grace which is real to you, that could be you. In that talk, he kind of gives credit for him being who he is to the grace of God. So I'll tell you what I came to believe, I'll never forget where I was. I was in a camper RV in Daniel Boone National Park in between one of Kory's motocross races. I was studying and a lightbulb moment came on—Grace

is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so that we can now do what He did—and I wrote it out, wow! And once I saw that from 1st Corinthians 15, it made me understand grace is God's enabling power. Whew! Grace is not (my opinion) God providing something and then leaving it up to us; grace is God doing it all...start to finish. It's His enabling power, and that's what Paul wants for the church. He wants them to experience God's grace, God's enabling power, God doing for them what they cannot do for themselves so that they can now do what Christ did. What did He do? He lived an obedient life to His Father. Amen?

“...and peace.” Now, we think of peace sometimes as absence of conflict, absence of war; that's not how the Jewish people use peace. Paul was heavily influenced by his Jewish background. So the way Paul's probably using this is not absence of conflict; I mean, that'd be kind of nice sometimes, right, but I'm sorry, we're not going to have absence of conflict in this world in which we live. Get over it guys...not going to happen. We're not going to have absence of war, it's going to happen. What this word, peace, means is ‘wholeness of life.’ When you have wholeness of life, healthy life, that sustains you in conflict, that sustains you in war, that sustains you in trouble, that sustains you in time of persecution, because this is coming from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Verse 4, I love this. I love this talking about Jesus Christ, “who gave Himself up for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age,” a life in hell forever and ever and ever. Now, I don't want to be critical here, but guys, I was raised in the church that taught me the reason I should get saved is so I wouldn't go to hell. I heard that every Sunday and thought that's why you got saved, so we wouldn't go to hell. I mean, there were just two kinds of people in the world...lost sinners and saved sinners. So there really wasn't going to be any difference in my life and someone else's life other than I could be saved while they're a lost, so I would be a saved sinner who goes to heaven, wouldn't go to hell, and they would be a lost sinner who went to hell. Salvation was presented this way—you believe in Jesus so you won't go to hell. Well, who wants to go to hell? Nobody!

Paul doesn't present the gospel that way. I challenge you to find Paul presenting the gospel that we get saved so we won't go to hell. Now he has Jesus dying for us, to deliver us, but what's he wanting the Galatian church to be delivered from? The present evil world. Wow! Now yes, Paul believed if you got saved you went to heaven, you didn't go to hell. I'm not saying Paul didn't believe that, but that's not the purpose of his writing. Paul believed that the Roman Empire, at this time, was evil. They had a Caesar, they had an authoritarian. He called the shots. Nobody bucked him. Ooh, wouldn't that be terrible to live in a society like that where everybody gave power to one person and that one person controlled everything? Society was evil and Paul wanted the Galatian church to be redeemed from that. He wanted them to live differently in the world in which they lived, and as they lived differently in the world in which they lived, it brought glory to who? It brought glory to their Father. Now, I think we believe this as Americans, Christian Americans, the world's just going to get worse and worse and worse. Agreed? We're not going to be the complainers, we're not going to be the bellyachers, we're not going to be the accusers. Do you know who we going to be? We're going to be the ones bring glory and honor to God. Do you know why? Because we've been redeemed, we've been set free from this present evil world!

If we went back to Ephesians 2, where we're dead in sin and He made us alive, raised us up, sent us in heaven, what are we being redeemed from? We're being redeemed from sin, sin as a power. Can you imagine being a sinner where you are still in bondage to sin and you're living in an evil world? Man, it's going to be all about you. Do you know people where it seems like everything they do is all about them? That's opposite of being a Christian. Why? Because Christians are not enslaved to sin anymore and we've been redeemed from this present evil age. This is why Paul writes to the church at Rome and says do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed. How? By the renewing of your mind. That's why he is writing this letter, is in this evil world God's going to use the church and change lives to bring honor, glory to Him. I've told you this for years and I believe

this all of my heart—I hope I live until Jesus comes back. Because here's what I believe Scripture teaches, it's going to get worse and worse and worse right before He comes back. It's going to get so bad that most people are going to abandon the church, except for the true church, and that's going to be our finest hour. It's going to be our finest hour because there are a whole lot of people that community thinks he's a believer...no, he's not a believer, she's not a believer...but you can't tell right now. But when it costs you to stand for the truth of God in a Christlike manner, did you hear that, Christlike manner, it's going to be our finest hour. Amen, and I want to be a part of that. Do you?