

GALATIANS 1 COMMENTARY SAMPLE – The Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC)

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DAY 1

I. Introduction (1:1–10).

A. *The salutation* (1:1–5).

1:1. The opening of the Galatian epistle is both typical and atypical. Though the salutation includes the usual identification of author and recipient together with a customary greeting, the usual expression of thanksgiving and praise for believers is totally absent. Further, there is an abruptness about the opening words which plunges the reader immediately into one of Paul's major concerns, namely, that his apostolic credentials had been challenged. Though not one of the original Twelve, **Paul** claimed equality with them as **an apostle**. The word *apostolos* connotes authority and refers to a person who has a right to speak for God as His representative or delegate.

Paul's apostleship did not originate with men (it was **not from men**), that is, he was not appointed an apostle by any official body such as the leaders in Jerusalem or Antioch. Neither did his apostleship originate with any one man, however important (**nor by man**) not even Ananias, who assisted Paul in Damascus (cf. Acts 9:10–17), nor Barnabas, who played a strategic role in opening doors of ministry for Paul in both Jerusalem and Antioch (cf. Acts 9:27; 11:25–26). Rather, Paul made the bold **v 2, p 590** claim that his call was of heavenly origin, from **God the Father** and the risen Lord **Jesus Christ**. This is the only direct mention of the resurrection of Christ in the epistle. It emphasizes the importance of that event to Paul's apostleship, for he was not called during the earthly ministry of the Lord but by the resurrected Christ.

DAY 2

1:2. Joining with Paul in the sending, though not the writing, of this letter were **all the brothers with him**. These were the apostle's fellow workers, perhaps Barnabas as well as the prophets and teachers with whom Paul ministered in Antioch (cf. Acts 13:1). Mentioning these co-laborers emphasized the fact that the teachings of this epistle were not peculiar to Paul but were held in common with others.

The recipients of the letter were **the churches in Galatia**. (See map before Rom.) This was then a circular letter probably directed to the churches founded during the first missionary journey of Paul and located in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch.

1:3. The traditional Greek and Hebrew forms of greeting, **grace and peace**, were always used by Paul in his salutations to express the hope that the believing readers might be sustained by daily portions of these blessings. "Grace and peace" find their source in **God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ**. (See the chart, "Paul's Introductions to His Epistles" at Rom. 1:1–7.)

1:4–5. Paul concluded his salutation with a magnificent statement regarding the work of Christ on the cross and its delivering power, another major emphasis of this epistle. Christ **gave Himself for our sins** (cf. 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 3:18). His death was voluntary and final. It satisfied God's righteous demands against sinners, reconciled people to God, and provided for human redemption. One purpose of Christ's death is **to rescue us from the present evil age**. The gospel is an emancipating message. It delivers believing sinners from the power of the present world system through the power of the indwelling Christ just as certainly as it delivers them from eternal judgment to come. Was Paul hinting that the Old Testament Law, so strongly promoted by the Galatian legalizers, would be impotent to accomplish such great things?

In His redemptive work Christ accomplished **the will of ... God** (Gal. 1:4c; cf. Heb. 10:7–10). Further, in that obedience the Savior brought **glory** to God (Gal. 1:5; cf. John 17:1). Redeemed saints will in addition give glory to God **forever** because of the redeeming work of Jesus Christ.

Thus Paul had already drawn the lines of battle by touching on two vital concerns. He had affirmed his own apostleship and had declared that the basis of man's salvation lies solely in the work of Christ and not in any human works.

DAY 3

B. *The denunciation (1:6–10)*

Conspicuous by its absence is Paul's usual expression of thanksgiving to God for his readers. Instead he vented his astonishment and anger over the Galatians' defection. When compared with the opening of 1 Corinthians this is even more striking, for despite the Corinthians' deep moral defection Paul nonetheless expressed commendation. But here in the face of theological departure he did not express thanks, thus emphasizing the more serious nature of doctrinal apostasy.

1:6–7. Paul's astonishment was over an almost inconceivable turn of events—the Galatian believers were in the process of turning away (**deserting**, *metatithesthe*, as in a military desertion) from the truth. Part of the apostle's amazement was because it was happening **so quickly** after his last visit to them, or so soon after the false teachers began their insidious work. The departure was not simply from a system of theology but from God Himself, **the One who had called them by the grace of Christ** (the dominant theme of the epistle). In exchange they were embracing **a different gospel**, one that was false. Paul insisted that a gospel of legalism which adds work to faith is not the same kind of gospel that he preached and by which they were saved. It was actually an attempt **to pervert the gospel of Christ**. And Paul was aware of the fact that at the very time he was writing this epistle the false teachers were at work troubling or **throwing** the Galatians **into confusion** (cf. Acts 15:24; 20:29–30).

DAY 4

1:8. To emphasize the fact that the true **gospel** of the grace of God cannot be changed, Paul first stated a hypothetical case. **If** he (a divinely called apostle) **or an angel** (a heavenly messenger) were to [V 2, p 591](#) alter the gospel message—a highly improbable situation—then **let him be** accursed or **eternally condemned** (*anathema*).

1:9. In this verse Paul seemed to repeat himself, but he actually advanced his thought. Paul and Barnabas had given a warning of judgment when they had preached to the Galatians. Now Paul repeated it. A zealous champion of the purity of the gospel of grace, Paul said it again: **If anybody** were **preaching** a different **gospel** (which the false teachers were), he would come under God's eternal judgment. It is not difficult to understand why Paul reacted so strongly, because the Judaizers were impugning the Cross; for if works were necessary for salvation, then the work of Christ was not sufficient (cf. 2:21). Furthermore a great deal is at stake for lost people. When the gospel message is corrupted, the way of salvation is confused and people are in danger of being eternally lost.

1:10. Apparently the Judaizers had charged Paul with teaching freedom from the Law in order to curry the Gentiles' favor. But the tone of this letter, specifically the harsh language Paul had just used, was hardly calculated **to win the approval of men**. Men-pleasers simply do not hurl *anathemas* against those who proclaim false gospels. Indeed, if the apostle had wanted **to please men**, he would have remained a zealous Pharisee and promoter of the Law rather than becoming **a servant of Christ**. Elsewhere Paul affirmed his purpose to please God, not men (cf. 6:12; 1 Thes. 2:4).

DAY 5

II. **Personal: A Defense of Paul's Authority (1:11–2:21)**

Paul then took up in more detail the challenge to his authority as an apostle. Was he a self-appointed impostor? Arguing autobiographically, Paul declared that (a) he was an apostle before he met the other apostles; (b) when he did meet them he was received as an equal; (c) and he even found it necessary to rebuke Peter, the reputed chief apostle.

A. *He was independent of the apostles (1:11–24).*

1. THESIS: PAUL'S GOSPEL WAS A REVELATION (1:11–12).

1:11–12. First, Paul certified that **the gospel** did not originate with **man**. Man-made religions emphasize human merit and the necessity of human works for salvation. Paul’s message did not. Second, the apostle declared that he **did not receive** the gospel from any human source. Though he heard Stephen preach and had personal contacts with Ananias and Barnabas, he was not indebted to them for his knowledge of spiritual truth. Third, Paul affirmed he did not receive the gospel he preached by means of some course of instruction. Even though that was the way the Galatians received the gospel (as Paul had instructed them), the apostle on the other hand **received it by revelation from Jesus Christ**. This was the highest authority. How then could the Galatians question his authority and message? And how did they dare deviate from this divinely revealed truth?

2. EVENTS BEFORE PAUL’S CONVERSION (1:13–14).

1:13–14. By appealing to his personal history Paul established beyond any doubt that he did not learn his gospel from men. Beginning with his preconversion life, he showed that his only relationship to the church was that of a fanatic persecutor of it. Standing before Herod Agrippa II, Paul summarized his frenzied oppression of Christians (cf. Acts 26:9–11). Coupled with this was the fact that he was also zealous to advance as a Pharisee **in Judaism**. He felt driven to excel over other **Jews his own age**. He loved the Law and was **zealous for the traditions of his fathers**. He no doubt spent much time studying the Law of Moses and the accompanying Rabbinical traditions. Thus who could accuse Paul of not being acquainted with the teachings of Judaism when he knew them better than the Judaizers?

DAY 6

3. EVENTS AT PAUL’S CONVERSION (1:15–16a).

1:15–16a. The contrast with the preceding (vv. 13–14) is striking and is occasioned by God’s intervention in the life of Saul of Tarsus: **But ... God**. Nowhere is this intervention more graphically described than in Acts 9. Here Paul simply enumerated three things God did for him. First, God **set him apart from birth**. [V 2, p 592](#) Paul knew that God had providentially set him apart from birth and that all his life to this point was a preparation for his ministry as a proclaimer of the gospel of God’s grace. Second, God **called Paul by His grace**. This is a reference to the time of Paul’s salvation. He responded to God’s efficacious call and received Jesus Christ as Savior. In Romans (8:30) Paul gave the sequence of God’s work in salvation: “Those He predestined, He also called; those He called, He also justified; those He justified, He also glorified.” Third, God **was pleased to reveal His Son in Paul**. Blinded as he had been to the deity of Jesus Christ and thinking that the Nazarene was a fraud, God gave Paul an outward vision of Christ on the Damascus Road and later an inner revelation concerning the full significance of the person and work of the Savior. The purpose of this revelation was that Paul **might preach Him among the Gentiles**. The Book of Acts gives full account of Paul’s ministry to the non-Jewish world on his missionary journeys. He became known as the apostle to the Gentiles (cf. Acts 9:15; 13:46–47; 26:20; Rom. 11:13; 15:16; Eph. 3:8; 1 Tim. 2:7). Thus Paul emphasized that both his conversion and his commission owed nothing to man but were of God. How else could such a transformation—from persecutor to preacher—be explained?

4. EVENTS AFTER PAUL’S CONVERSION (1:16b–24).

1:16b–17. Paul had emphasized that he did not receive his message from men before or at the time of his conversion. Now he affirmed that he was free from human influences afterward as well. Though Paul met other Christians after his conversion he did not **consult** them on doctrine. If he had been uncertain about the gospel, he could readily have gone **to Jerusalem** for a seminar with the **apostles**, but he did not. Rather he **went immediately into Arabia**. It is doubtful that he went there to evangelize but rather to be away from men and alone with the Lord for personal study, meditation, and to receive further revelation. This zealous student of the Law now pondered the meaning of his conversion and looked for the things concerning Christ in the Old Testament (cf. Luke 24:27). The product of these days in Arabia was the Christian theology that Paul explained in his epistle to the Romans.

The point of Paul's declaration is clear. He formed his theology not by consulting with others, but independently as he sought God's guidance.

DAY 7

1:18–20. Paul then reinforced his previous argument by asserting that he waited **three years** after his conversion to go **to Jerusalem**, time that was spent in Arabia and Damascus (v. 17). Would he have waited that long if he had needed theological instruction from the disciples? When he did go, it was **to get acquainted with Peter**, that is, it was a personal visit lasting only **15 days**. Paul then left because of a plot against his life (cf. Acts 9:29). Meanwhile Paul had had a meaningful time coming to know the noted apostle, but there is no suggestion that Peter gave him theological instruction or apostolic endorsement for his ministry. Of the rest of the apostles Paul met only **James, the Lord's brother**, a leader in the church in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 12:17). To stress the truth of what he had just said—no doubt in the face of a Judaizer's charge that he had misrepresented his relationship to the apostles—Paul put himself on oath, calling God to be his witness that he was telling the truth.

1:21–22. After his abbreviated visit in Jerusalem Paul worked for an extended time in **Syria and Cilicia**, which is why he **was personally unknown to the churches of Judea** (cf. Acts 9:30; 11:25). He was not commissioned for this ministry by the apostles, and because of the distance between him and Jerusalem he could not have been under their authority or subject to their oversight.

1:23–24. The churches in Judea by this time had almost forgotten Paul. The only **report** they had recently **heard** was that this one who had once **persecuted** the church was **now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy**. This would of course include the doctrine of justification by faith apart from circumcision or works. And in the face of this report the Judean believers **praised God because of Paul**. This was a telling blow to the false teachers. The Jewish Christians in Judea rejoiced in the same gospel the Judaizers sought to undermine.¹

¹ Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 589-592.