

***Sabbath School Today***  
**With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

***The Gospel in Galatians***  
**Lesson 1. Paul: Apostle to the Gentiles**

Have you learned to *love* the Book of Galatians? Or is it dull, boring, confusing, to you? It has been the spark that has ignited glorious reformations in people's lives since the time of Martin Luther. So you should learn to make friends with it, to love it, to let your heart revel in its powerful good news.

How does a lukewarm, sensual, half-worldly, half-cold, half-hot person get to be "on fire" like Paul? The answer is Galatians. People wonder why Galatians could have such gospel dynamite in it that it one time turned Europe upside down.

It is quite evident that the Third Angel's Message hasn't turned the world upside down. Yet, our quarterly maintains that we have accepted the 1888 message. The statement of the "acceptance theory" of the 1888 message of righteousness by faith is made in the quarterly with these words: "Through the study of Galatians, E. J. Waggoner and A. T. Jones helped the Adventist Church rediscover the truth of righteousness by faith in the 1880s and 1890s" (*The Gospel in Galatians*, p. 2 [2017]).

The word "rediscover" is the operative word. This cannot be maintained in view of what Ellen White wrote: "An unwillingness to yield up preconceived opinions, ... [occurred] at Minneapolis against the Lord's message through Brethren [E. J.] Waggoner and [A. T.] Jones. By exciting that opposition Satan succeeded in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit that God longed to impart to them. ... The light that is to lighten the whole earth with its glory was resisted, and by the action of our own brethren has been in a great degree kept away from the world." [1]

The church has yet to identify justification by faith with the at-one-ment with God sanctuary truth. To date justification is viewed, as do other denominations, with a mere legal transaction that doesn't affect the heart alienation with God. The church would be turned upside down if it captured the "big ideas" in Galatians that explode in people's hearts like sticks of spiritual dynamite. We *must* study and learn the message of Galatians—what Christ accomplished for us by His sacrifice on the cross, the good news of the atonement, which is the new covenant.

The one who wrote Galatians was the former Saul, a murderous "thug," the end product of Israel's old covenant unbelief. How ironic, that Saul should participate in the stoning of Stephen, the prophet. This event signaled the end of the 490 years of grace extended by God to His people (Dan. 9:24). God's patient forgiving mercy terminated for the "Jewish church." Its national apostasy in the worship of "self"—manifested in its ceremonialism (Acts 7:48-50)—drove away the Spirit of God (vs. 51). This resulted in

national ruin and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. by the Romans. But Christ plucked a brand from the fire,—the Pharisee Saul,—before its collapse.

Saul was a microcosm of the centuries-long old covenant unbelief of the ancient Israelite church in which they promised God to do everything just right (Ex. 19:8; cf. Heb. 8:7, 8). Christ Himself had instituted all the rites and ceremonies after they made their old covenant with God at Mount Sinai. God's intent with these "shadows" of the gospel was to lead them back to "the faith" in His promise of the everlasting covenant. But the leadership and scholarship of that day did not know the meaning of these types and shadows and failed to identify their Messiah—the suffering Crucified One—when He came into their midst.

The significance of Stephen's defense speech before the "council" and "high priest" was God's last warning and appeal to the leadership of His church to repent for their idolatrous history culminating in the murder of "the Just One" (Acts 7:52). The "council" had accused Stephen of teaching lawlessness (Acts 6:13); but they were the idolaters cherishing murder in their hearts (Acts 7:53). Stephen proclaimed the law and the gospel of the cross of Christ, which pricked their hearts. They chose to reject the Spirit's gift of repentance that Stephen announced. They took up stones to kill him. The leadership's decision sealed their fate as a nation. They would no more listen to the still small voice of the Spirit. They committed the unpardonable sin by attributing the work of the Spirit through Stephen to the work of the devil (cf. Matt. 12:22-32).

The young Saul was part of the council that participated in the stoning of Stephen. The shining face of Stephen and his forgiving spirit toward his executioners made a profound impression upon Saul (Acts 7:60). [2] Jesus had prayed for them all, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34; Acts 6:15-7:60). And that was Stephen's last sermon. We have the sermon recorded. There was no self in it. No "prophet of Baal" could preach such a sermon.

Saul, too, resisted the Holy Spirit, and gave in to the "group think" of his superiors of the Sanhedrin. He concluded with them that Stephen was a blasphemer and that Christians were followers of an imposter messiah. Saul believed Stephen was a libertine and a destroyer of the law of God.

Saul now sought to gain the favor of his colleagues by following their example in the murder of Stephen. By obtaining letters of recommendation from the high court in Jerusalem he designed to go out to the synagogues and, with their support, persecute the followers of Jesus. This was Saul's purpose when journeying to Damascus.

But the Lord Jesus arrested him on the road with the blinding vision of His exalted position in heaven as a result of His crucifixion (Acts 26:13). The Lord Jesus asked him, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4; 26:14). Writes Ellen White, "*Christ here identifies Himself with His people.*" [3] Saul was sincerely deceived by Satan. In doing the work of Satan he thought he was doing the work of God. He was actually re-crucifying the Son of God afresh in the person of His saints.

Christ said to Saul: “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 26:14). The Lord put obstacles in his path to make the wrong way seem like kicking against the ox goads. Yes, the Lord made it “hard” for Saul to be lost by speaking to his conscience.

One of the “good news” ideas of the 1888 message is: easy to be saved, hard to be lost when God reveals His love (*agape*) to you. You live because One died in your place; *agape* now motivates you. “All along the road that leads to [eternal] death there are pains and penalties, there are sorrows and disappointments, there are warnings not to go on. God’s love has made it hard for the heedless and headstrong to destroy themselves.” [4]

When the enthroned Christ stopped Saul on the road the antagonist asked: “Who art thou, Lord? And He said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest” (Acts 26:15). This was Jesus’ self-revelation of the ever-present cross to Saul. Regarding this event Ellen White makes an insightful comment: “In the glorious Being who stood before him *he saw the Crucified One.*” [5]

The Holy Spirit convicted Saul’s heart by means of the cross of Christ. Saul experienced a heart-melting appreciation that the Messiah is “the Crucified One.” Now all the prophecies, types and shadows of the ceremonial system came alive for him as pointing to “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Later, Saul received the laying on of hands by Ananias. Thus Saul/Paul was ordained as Christ’s “chosen vessel ... to bear [His] name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Above all, Paul was called to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. In his speech before Agrippa, the call to a Gentile mission constitutes the center of Paul’s conversion account. Paul is sent forth as the servant and witness of Christ (Acts 26:16).

—Paul E. Penno

#### **Endnotes:**

[1] Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235 [Letter 96, 1896].

[2] See also Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 115, 116.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 117.

[4] Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 139.

[5] *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 115.

#### **Notes:**

Pastor Paul Penno’s video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/dzb8hVVVqWU>

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