

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

***The Gospel in Galatians***  
**Lesson 2. Paul's Authority and Gospel**

The first five verses of Galatians contain the whole gospel. Paul never wastes a chance to remind people of the basics of the gospel. Wrapped into his greeting he mentions that the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the evil in the world, and the Father raised Him from the dead.

There it is, the gospel in a nutshell. Paul is emphatic that people understand the true gospel because there had been attacks against his preaching. From a human standpoint, Paul had much going against him. To the Pharisees, he was a traitor. He had been one of their most promising students, having an intellect and zeal that made him stand out. He had helped in the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. Now he renounced all that and was preaching the gospel they hated, and exposing their treachery and complicity in the crucifixion of Christ. He had definitely earned the hatred of the Pharisees, so it was no surprise they were willing to use every trick to undermine him. The leadership in Jerusalem must have been behind the people that followed him trying to undermine his preaching.

The attacks came on various fronts. It was easy to attack his authority as an apostle, since that title was reserved for those who had actually walked with Jesus when He was physically on earth. Paul countered this by saying he was personally tutored by Jesus while in Arabia (Gal. 1:17). It is likely this story was scoffed at by those who didn't want to believe. Were there any witnesses to this or was it just something Paul concocted to gain people's confidence? Even today, people are skeptical when evangelists claim to have direct revelations from God.

In addition, it was easy to raise doubt in the minds of Jewish people by accusing Paul of preaching against the law when he taught that righteousness did not come from law keeping, but by faith alone in the saving grace of Jesus Christ. People who rely on their good works for assurance of salvation react with satanic hatred and anger when anyone teaches grace. This is where the Galatians were deceived. People that Paul called "false brethren" (Gal. 2:4) accused Paul of preaching an incomplete gospel. Yes, the grace Christ accomplished was good but it wasn't enough, circumcision was also necessary. Although the issues we face today are different from circumcision, any human effort done to attempt to please God is not genuine faith, but rather a fear of punishment or hope of reward. Many who teach the concepts of faith alone, especially as embodied by the message given to our church in 1888 face the same hatred and anger because it places human glory where it belongs, in the dust.

The same things that had made Paul such a favorite to the Pharisees, caused consternation and suspicion among the newly established churches he was trying to plant and nourish. Even with a direct order from God to take Paul in, Ananias questioned this telling God, "Lord, I have heard from many about his man, how much harm he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem; and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call upon Thy name" (Acts 9:13, 14). This concern and suspicion must have been a factor for Paul to overcome at every town that knew of his reputation.

He was apparently also criticized for his intellect. Even today, there are many who object to having to make even the smallest effort to understand some of the deeper aspects of the gospel. They claim, "if it isn't simple, it isn't the gospel." There must have been those people who complained that Paul was too hard to understand, but Peter called them "untaught and unstable" (2 Peter 3:16). We are told that the plan of salvation is so deep we will study it for eternity. If the gospel is simple it couldn't hold our interest and concentration to study it indefinitely.

From a human standpoint, it does seem reasonable to wonder if God knew what He was doing when He chose someone with so much "baggage" that predictably would compromise his ministry. It's no different today. There are many who are afraid to study the message of righteousness by faith, citing their belief that A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner later "lost their way." Two contemporary authors have written, "We are faced here with a unique problem":

"The especially difficult question is why should God choose as special messengers those who would later become unsound in the faith? Why should He permit the bearers of His sharply contested message to go astray when their apostasy would only confirm the opposition to that message? ... God's footsteps may be mysterious, but that is no reason why we should carelessly misunderstand this strange providence.

"To suppose that the Lord made a strategic mistake in choosing Jones and Waggoner is unthinkable, for He never errs in counsel. ...

"Inspired evidence suggests an answer to our questions, and indicates that:

"(1) Jones and Waggoner were not 'carried away' by any 'extreme views' regarding the righteousness of Christ, but they were *driven away* by persistent and unreasoning opposition of the brethren whom God sent them to enlighten.

"(2) Ellen White recognized the seriousness of the opposition to them personally and to their message, and fixed the ultimate blame for their later failure '*to a great degree*' upon the opposing brethren.

"(3) The Lord permitted the sad event to take place as a test to the opposing brethren; and the failures of the 1888 messengers have had the effect of confirming 'us' in a state of virtual unbelief. ... It seems that the Lord is such a Gentleman that He apparently goes out of His way to provide hooks for us to hang our doubts on if we want them. He

does not want any of us to receive the latter rain unless we are fully heart-committed to Him and to His truth. ...

“(4) The practical results of the investigative judgment will require that the remnant church, before the time of final victory, come to see the truth of the message and its history and recognize Jones’ and Waggoner’s work from 1888-96 for its true value, the ‘beginning’ of the latter rain and the loud cry.” [1]

Ellen White admonished “Let no soul complain of the servants of God who have come to them with a heaven-sent message. ... He sees the temperament of the men He has chosen. He knows that none but earnest, firm, determined, strong-feeling men will view this work in its vital importance, and will put such firmness and decision into their testimonies that they will make a break against the barriers of Satan.” [2]

“It must be said to their credit that Jones and Waggoner did not renounce faith in the God of Israel. They never became infidels or agnostics or atheists. They never gave up the Sabbath or their lifelong devotion to Christ. In today’s climate of church fellowship they would still be members in good and regular standing. *Their sin was that they lost faith in the corporate body of the church and its leadership.* They were not confident of denominational repentance. They came to doubt human nature; hence Jones’ bitterness and the failings of their own human nature. The enemy will press us sorely to repeat their failure. But we need not give in!” [3]

—Arlene Hill

#### **Endnotes:**

[1] Robert J. Wieland and Donald K. Short, *1888 Re-examined: 1888-1988—The Story of a Century of Confrontation Between God and His People*, pp. 116-117 (1987).

[2] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 410, 413.

[3] *1888 Re-examined*, p. 119.

#### **Notes:**

Bible texts are from the *New American Standard Bible*.

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

<https://youtu.be/jUY3iuUcV20>

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