

## **Let Freedom Ring: Thoughts on Galatians – Part 1**

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Man intuitively yearns for freedom. Through the ages, numerous thinkers have suggested schemes for human liberty. Examples are readily found in the founding documents of my homeland, the United States; they are choked full of references to liberation from tyranny and oppression. Ironically of all the enslaving powers on earth, man is unable to achieve freedom from his vices and personal passions – things that are symptomatic of sin within the core of his being.

### **The Magna Carta Of Christian Liberty**

Some people think that freedom from indwelling evil is to be attained through religious observance or esoteric disciplines. Due to their human origin, however, the world's religions are powerless to liberate people from the thralldom of darkness that stems from their sin. In fact, religious people have no assurance of the forgiveness of sins which is a prerequisite for a relationship with the Creator God. Nor do human rites and ceremonies free one from sin's power. There are many counterfeit paths to freedom, but only a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith can free one from sin's penalty and power – even from sin's presence, eventually, when He returns.

*The Epistle to the Galatians* begins by affirming the divine origin of Paul's apostleship and the gospel that he preached. In context, this was important to establish, for there were competing false-apostles propounding erroneous messages and methods of salvation to the Galatian churches (e.g. Gal. 6:12.) Likewise, in the modern world the biblical gospel is one among many competing truth claims. One must understand, however, that Christianity is based upon divine revelation, not on human thinking or ingenuity.

### **God's Messenger Of Liberty**

The messenger introduces himself in a manner that displays his credentials: "Paul, an apostle (not from men or through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead)..." (Gal. 1:1.) He is an apostle, which is defined by one dictionary in these words: "One who fulfills the role of being a special messenger (generally restricted to the immediate followers of Jesus Christ, but also extended, as in the case of Paul, to other early Christians active in proclaiming the message of the gospel)—'apostle, special messenger.'"<sup>i</sup> Another adds: "It always denotes a man who is sent, and sent with full authority."<sup>ii</sup>

Paul's apostleship was not of human origin – "not from men," as he puts it. He was not sent out by a group of missionary minded men, nor a human organization. Neither was he put into this work "through man." He was ordained by the Lord without the use of human intermediaries. His

particular office and function derived from God, who chose him as His emissary to the nations (Acts 9:15.) As such, his authority stemmed from the will and character of the Almighty. As he articulates the source of it: "...through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (Gal. 1:1.) The Son and the Father selected and commissioned Paul to his service as an apostle. The Lord Jesus Himself was vindicated and authenticated by the Father raising Him from the dead. Thus, this apostle and this message were authorized and originated in the Risen Christ.

Conversely, his adversaries were mere men with human agendas and ineffectual pseudo-gospels that were impotent to change their adherents. By contrast, Paul declared God's Word, which is able to save and transform those who receive it (e.g. Rom. 1:16; Heb. 4:12.) Yet he was no lone wolf in this work, for he then goes on to mention "and all the brethren who are with me" (verse 2.) Therefore, the brothers who were with him were also in fellowship with his work and message. So one sees that Paul's gospel is the one that comes from God – the One who revealed Himself in history through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son the Lord Jesus Christ. The message of Galatians may be paraphrased thus: "Don't be fooled by imposters or swayed by 'new and improved' gospels. Look back to the original glad tidings that come from the true and living God." Freedom can only be found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus, so consider the good news that He gave through His apostle Paul.

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<sup>i</sup> Louw, Johannes P., and Eugene Albert Nida. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains*. electronic ed. of the 2nd edition. New York: United Bible societies, 1996. Electronic edition (Logos.)

<sup>ii</sup> Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, "apostolos," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Edited by Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964-. Electronic edition (Logos.)