

Lesson 2

"Paul's Authority and Gospel"

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is repeating the history of the church in Galatia. Our divine commission is to proclaim the "third angel's message in verity" to the world. The first chapter of Galatians contains this message. There is a counterfeit gospel that is vying for first-place contender and we need the Apostle Paul's help.

The Apostle was sent from God and his words are the commandments of God (John 3:34). He tells us there are only two gospels, and he sets forth the genuine at the outset. "The everlasting gospel" (first angel, Rev. 14:6) is "grace" and "peace."

Strictly speaking, we are saved by God's grace alone (Eph. 2:8). Christ has been given to every man (Eph. 4:7; John 1:9). If a rich man gives you a check for \$1000 and you do not cash it, what have you lost?

Christ has given every man the forgiveness of sins and the peace of reconciliation with God. He "gave Himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:4). Does it make any difference what we believe about what Christ accomplished at the cross? Has "the Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people" in these last days that honors and glorifies Christ in His sacrifice? (See *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 91.) Is He indeed "the Saviour of the world" (John 4:42) or does He merely offer to be? Are all men actually infinitely and eternally in debt to Him for even their next breath? Why can the Father send His rain and sunshine on "all men," "the just and the unjust," unless Christ has actually accomplished something for them all and has *given* them the *gift*?

He went to hell. He died a death in which He could not see the resurrection coming up. He poured out His soul unto death says Isaiah 53:12. There was nothing left to pour out. The last drop was drained. He emptied Himself for us. How amazing is Christ's grace? The woman to whom Christ spoke the words, "Your sins are forgiven," cashed the check. She received the at-one-ment with God as Christ said to her, "Go in peace" (Luke 7:48, 50).

The first angel's message announcing the everlasting gospel has as its burden, "Fear God, and give Him glory" (Rev. 14:7). Here the Apostle Paul in Galatians ascribes the glory to God by setting forth the everlasting gospel (Gal. 1:5).

But there is a bewildering, inconsistent situation, when at the same time the genuine gospel is proclaimed to the world, there is a counterfeit--"another gospel," which is not another gospel nor is it good news. Its source is a fallen "angel from heaven" (Gal. 1:8). "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light ... his ministers ... transformed as the ministers of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:14, 15). Their counterfeit gospel is the reason "Babylon is fallen" (second angel, Rev. 14:8). These "ministers" "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal. 1:7) because the gospel of self-love "please[s] men" (vs. 10). It is based on nothing but the theories of men and is designed to attract followers to men.

There are five gospels in the Laodicean church today: Historic Adventism ("obey and live, disobey and die"); the Social Gospel (humanitarianism); the Pentecostal gospel ("enthusiasm"); Evangelical Adventism (Arminian theology); the Calvinist gospel (the sovereignty of God who "forces" the final solution). All of these "gospels" are anti-law and so cannot be the third angel's message in verity. "The truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:5) is: "Here are they that *keep* ["grasp" the everlasting covenant] the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus" (Rev. 14:12).

Why should anyone be "accursed" for preaching a different gospel? Because "there shall arise false christs, and false prophets, and ... shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24). "Let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:9, the awful warning of the third angel's message [Rev. 14:9-11]). These preachers are leading God's people to trust for their salvation in something which is nothing. These counterfeit gospels are devised by men, so they are leading people to trust in their own power for salvation.

If you don't have the facts and logic to defeat the message, attack the messenger. It is as old as when Lucifer questioned God's authority to control His creation. For unknown eons, the universe enjoyed peace and happiness under God's governing principles of love and devotion between the Creator and His creatures. When Satan came to tempt Eve, rather than directly attacking God's message of unselfish love, he attacked God Himself. He argued to Eve that God was selfishly denying them the knowledge of evil because with it, they would become just like Him. In effect, Satan was arguing that God had no authority over Adam and Eve because if He allowed them access to what He had forbidden, they would become equal with Him.

The arguments being used against Paul are so similar that their source should have been readily apparent. Why were the Galatians deceived? A counterfeit can deceive only if it is close to the original. I recently saw what at first looked like a very large denomination bill on someone's desk. Closer examination revealed it was a joke as the value was \$1,000,000,000,000,000. It had a picture of Mickey Mouse, not a president, so it fooled no one.

Paul's response to this is not an egotistical listing of his accomplishments to impress. Today, we would call it something like a *curriculum vitae* or resumé, which gives the history of a person's education and work experience. The argument against Paul had been that he wasn't trained by Christ Himself, as had the eleven apostles, but Paul defeats that by referring to his time in Arabia and Damascus where he learned from the Holy Spirit, not humans (Gal. 1:11-24). Notice that Paul does not list his extensive training in the schools of the Pharisees, which might have impressed those who did not believe divine authority.

Similar methods are used today to question the authority of a gospel teacher. A modern Adventist historian describes the unpolished and supposedly unlettered A. T. Jones as "a towering, angular man, with a loping gait and uncouth posturing and gestures" (A. W. Spalding, *Captains of the Host*, p. 591). Ellen White did not agree, and defended him: "It is evident that he walks with God, that he has been with Jesus and learned of Him. ... He is earnest and sincere, and beloved by those for whom he labors. ... His defects will be forgiven and forgotten. His hearers will not become weary or disgusted, but will thank God for the message of grace sent them through His servant" ("Christian Education," 1893, quoted in *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, pp. 242, 243; *Review and Herald*, April 18, 1893).

Another way to undermine authority is to revise history. If church members are taught that everything was accepted in 1888, there is no need to investigate original sources, and the status quo is accepted. The worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church has been taught through authoritative publications that the 1888 message of righteousness by faith alone was accepted in that generation by the predominant leadership, and has been the secure doctrinal possession of the church ever since (cf. *A Further Appraisal of the Manuscript "1888 Re-examined,"* General Conference, September 1958, p. 11). Unfortunately, A. G. Daniells thought differently: "This message of righteousness in Christ ... met with opposition on the part of earnest, well-meaning men in the cause of God! The [1888] message has never been received, nor proclaimed, nor given free course as it should have been ... (A. G. Daniells, *Christ Our Righteousness*, p. 47 [1924]).

Ellen White agreed with Daniells. "At Minneapolis ... Satan succeeded in shutting away from our people, in a great measure, the special power of the Holy Spirit. ... The enemy prevented them from obtaining that efficiency which might have been theirs in carrying the truth to the world. ... 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" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 234, 235).

The only true gospel is "by the revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 1:12). The "revelation" is yours just as much as it is anybody else's. If you have a Bible and you can read, if you've got eyes to see, sing the Hallelujah Chorus. Let the gospel leap at you from these pages and find a place in your heart. You'll never be the same.

If you learn to understand the gospel, and accept and believe the gospel, you will win souls. The gospel will flow out from you to somebody else.

--The Staff