

Paul, An Apostle

"... not from men, neither through men, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father ..." (Gal. 1:1). In ten of Paul's acknowledged letters he identified himself as an apostle: an apostle through the will of God. Only the two letters to the Thessalonians and the letter to Philippi omits such a declaration about himself. The word "apostle" literally means "one sent" and the usual meaning of the more than 70 times the word "apostle" (*apostolos*) appears it is of them who were either the Lord's twelve or Paul, chosen as an apostle to the Gentiles. Once the word *psuedapostolos* (false apostle) is found (2 Cor. 11:3) and four times the word *apostole* (apostleship) appears. While wherever the word "apostle" appears it ALWAYS RETAINS its primary meaning (one sent), its meaning is not always to those chosen, endowed with the Holy Spirit and sent by Jesus to preach the gospel into all the world. Jesus is our APOSTLE, because he was sent by God "*into the world not to condemn the world but that the world through Him might be saved*" (Heb. 3:1; Jn. 3:17). Jesus chose the twelve from among the multitude of disciples and sent them to preach first among the Jews but ultimately to all nations. In Acts 13:3, 14 Paul and Barnabas are called "apostles," not because Barnabas was an apostle equal to the twelve but because he and Paul had been sent by the church in Antioch to preach the gospel among the Gentiles (Acts 13:3).

There was a reason why Paul wrote every letter he did. There was a reason for this Galatian letter. They were removing themselves "*from him who called them to another gospel, which was not another gospel ...*" (Gal. 1:6f). These Galatian churches were troubled by Judaizing teachers: men who accepted Jesus as God's Son and believed one must be baptized, but who also believed men must be circumcised and keep the law. Until the conversion of Cornelius this was the prevailing view of the church and Peter was severely reprimanded for entering into the house of one uncircumcised and eating with him (Acts 11:3). And, although the Jerusalem brethren accepted that Cornelius' conversion was genuine, old practices and old convictions "die hard." The "Jerusalem conference" had clearly stated that Gentiles were not to be burdened with the matter of circumcision or keeping the law and letters to that intent had been written and sent to Gentile churches, even to the very ones that Paul wrote this Galatian letter (Acts 15:1-5). Still, some among the brethren would not accept that edict and to gain a following among gentile Christians, their first line of defense was to discredit Paul for it was through his ardent labor these churches were formed. Thus they sought

to discredit the authority by which he spoke by attacking his apostleship. They claimed that Paul was not an apostle as were Peter, James and John and that those men taught differently than Paul about circumcision and the law. They were highly effective in these tactics and their influence was wide spread. The subject was dealt with in Paul's letters to Rome, Corinth, Ephesus and Colossians but it is Galatians whose whole essence and being was to show the error of the doctrine and to do that it was necessary that he make stringent effort to prove his apostleship so that he might underline his teaching as the authority granted him by Jesus Christ. No other of his letters deals so extensively with his apostolic authority save his letter to Corinth where false apostles sought to gain foothold in the church through the same insidious means: a denial of Paul's apostleship.

He came directly to the point: "*Paul, an apostle not from men, neither through men, but through Jesus Christ.*" In these first two chapters Paul presents unimpeachable credentials. 1). He was directly chosen just as were the original twelve. 2). He was preaching the gospel long before he saw any of the original twelve (Gal. 1:13-23). 3). When the issue of circumcision and the law broke open at Antioch and Paul went to Jerusalem to talk with the earlier apostles, he laid before them the gospel he preached among the gentiles and none of the apostles added anything to nor disputed anything he taught (Gal. 2:3-6). 4). The apostles gave unto him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, thereby endorsing the things he taught and wrote (Gal. 2:7-9). 5). He rebuked Peter for his hypocrisy, thereby showing he was on an equality with him. All these things are strong points to show that he was indeed "*an apostle, not from men, neither through men, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father ...*"

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