

**Galatians 1**  
**(Chapters 1, 2)**

**I am crucified with Christ**

The word 'crucified' occurs four times in Galatians (Gal 2:20; 3:1; 5:24; 6:14). Our study of Galatians will be centred around Paul's use of this word.

**1:1-:5** These are the verses of greeting. Paul establishes himself as an apostle, an apostleship that is not based upon human accomplishment but upon divine calling. Paul stands on a divine mandate. God got him into this; Paul is not an apostle by his own efforts. He is not disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). Meeting Jesus Christ (Acts 9:1-9) radically changed Paul's life. This gave him an authority by revelation to his spirit. His mission was to the gentiles. In announcing Jesus Christ as his source, Paul describes Jesus as having given Himself for our sins that He might deliver us from this evil present age. The culture is always promoting anti-God claims. And yet our task is 'to serve the present age' (Charles Wesley) even as David served his own generation by the will of God (Acts 13:36).

**1:6-:10** Getting down to the reason for the letter, Paul says that he is amazed that the saints seem to be claiming another gospel. Paul is adamant: there is no other gospel! The problem is that the people are turning back from the revelation of faith to the observance of law. This is always a tendency for the religious. Religion is about our control of our experience. Law is about control: I control my religious performance which leads to self-righteousness by the quality and degree of my religious observance. The message and experience of Paul is that he is now no longer in control. He is no longer driving his religious experiences by his own efforts to justify himself by religious performance. He has yielded up himself to the work of Christ from whom he gains benefit only by faith. Paul then explains his own progress in the authority of the faith. He describes how he has moved from ferocious religious observance to being crucified with Christ, which is a place of abandonment of self and identification with the saving purposes of Calvary. It is total religious brokenness before the power of the Cross. Paul now lives by the Cross, not by the Law. His habit now is to not justify himself.

**1:11-:17** The gospel Paul preaches did not come to him by man nor was he taught it. The gospel he preaches came by revelation, through his meeting with Jesus Christ. This revelation was all the more amazing in that it came in the midst of Paul's systematic denial of it. Paul persecuted the gospel and imprisoned the believers who obeyed it. When Paul met Jesus Christ, he was confronted with a reality he could not deny but which he could disobey. Disobedience would have entrenched an even deeper hostility to the things of Christ. But Paul allowed himself to be totally disarmed by the appeal and reality of Christ. He embraced the Crucified One and surrendered his life to the power of the Cross. 'For I decided to know nothing among you but Christ and Him crucified' (1Cor 2:2). In recounting his experience of Christ he goes back to his start as a person (his physical beginning), to the God who separated him from his mother's womb. God knew his inner substance (Ps 139:13-16) and, knowing him, called him by His grace. God was pleased to reveal His Son in Paul for the purpose that he might preach the gospel to the gentiles. Given this spirit revelation, Paul did not confer with other people (flesh and blood) nor did he make himself dependent upon their opinion. Also he did not go up to Jerusalem to seek the approval of those who were apostles before him. Rather he went into the desert (Arabia) and

then back to Damascus (as if to verify the original experience). Paul here is showing that he does not have a derivative faith. He has apostolic authority because of direct revelation. This is a fire that he keeps pure and lit. Many were the forces that would try to extinguish it (2Cor 6:4-10). But he fights the good fight of faith and he looks forward to the crown of righteousness that is for those that love Christ's appearing (2Tim 4:6-8). Paul stands upon his experience of Jesus Christ which is revelation in him and through him. Above all, Paul wants to be true to this original revelation. The power of Christianity is that others can also experience the reality of Jesus Christ. Paul is not just trading experiences. He is pointing (through his experience) to a reality beyond his experience that others can grasp. This is the basic objectivity of Christianity. Jesus Christ is out there to be experienced and known. Taste and see for yourself (Ps 34:8). The experience of others is a guide to, not the substance of, the knowledge of Christ. Christ in us, the hope of glory (Col 1:27) is the work of the Holy Spirit. The Christian life comes from within, as the Spirit of Holiness rises within us bringing conviction (John 16:8), knowledge (John 14:26) and power (Acts 10:38; Rom 15:13). This becomes the ability to face the forces that are arrayed against us. Greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world (1John 4:4).

**1:18-:24** After 3 years Paul goes up to Jerusalem, seeing only Peter and James, the Lord's brother. Paul has trouble in Jerusalem because the disciples would not believe that he was a disciple (Acts 9:26-30). However, Barnabas supports him. Paul ably disputes with the Hellenists (Greek speaking Jews) who finally attempt to kill Paul. But the disciples take Paul away to Caesarea and finally Tarsus, his home town. He is unknown to the churches in Judea. All they know of Paul is that once he persecuted the church but he now preaches the faith that he once tried to destroy. Faith triumphed over law. And they glorified God because of him (in him).

**2:1-:10** After 14 years Paul goes back to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Once again Paul is verifying the gospel that he preaches. Although he works out of the intensity and reality of his personal revelation of Christ, he still submits what he preaches to the church. Correct doctrine is essential. People can wreck their lives with false doctrine. It has taken the church centuries to formulate the correct doctrines (creeds) of the church. This is because the truth is one but the false is many. That is, there can be many false variations on the one truth. Truth does not descend from the skies, complete and intact. It has to be sorted out in the understanding processes of the church. Paul says that he went up to Jerusalem by revelation (2:2). I take this to mean that he is going up to meet the apostles because of what is happening in his spirit. They are also dealing with a growing doctrinal conflict in the church. Some in the church are claiming that 'unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved' (Acts 15:1-5). Paul describes these people as false brethren who come by stealth to spy out our freedom in Christ (2:4). This conflict leads to the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15. The doctrinal result of the Council is that the church does not require the burden of the Law for Christians. However, they are to abstain from idolatry, blood, things strangled (blood not removed) and sexual immorality (Acts 15:29). There is the result of a division of labour in the mission of the church. It is agreed that Peter will go to the Jews and Paul to the gentiles. Paul has received a call to the gentiles (Acts 9:15). They are the burden of his apostleship. He has

received a call by revelation of Christ which is confirmed by the church 'when they saw that the gospel to the uncircumcised had been committed to me' (2:7). Both Peter and Paul agree to remember the poor.

**2:11-:21** When Peter came to Antioch, Paul confronted him over inconsistency in his behaviour. Peter would eat with the gentiles but when certain men came from Jerusalem he withdrew and ate only with the Jews, 'fearing the circumcision'. Paul then launches into his speech against being justified by the works of the law. His points are as follows:

1) We (Peter, Paul and the others) are Jews by birth and not gentile sinners.

2) We all believe that a person is not justified by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

3) Therefore we believe in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by faith in Him and not by the works of the law.

4) Because by the works of the law no one will be justified. Our own works/efforts/desires cannot get us there (save us).

5) If, in our efforts to be justified in Christ, we are found to be sinners, does that mean that Christ is a minister of sin? Definitely not!

6) If I rebuild (trust in the law) but I have torn it down (by faith in Christ), then I prove myself a sinner with respect to the law.

7) But, in fact, the law was the means by which I died to the law. Its requirements killed me because sin was activated by the commandment (Rom 7:7-12). The law brought death. I died to the law that I might live to God.

8) I have been crucified with Christ. This is the end result of Paul's move away from the law. This implies that he divests himself of his religious history and identity. His life is not about him and his accomplishments anymore. It is no longer about how far he can get with God but how far God, in Christ, can get with him. The deepest level of the change and new commitment in his life is expressed by crucifixion. The CROSS is the way by which we offer ourselves totally to God. There is no deeper a surrender. Paul now can handle being stripped of all worldly achievement, possession and satisfaction. He dies daily (1Cor 15:31). He can endure the loss of all things for the excellence of knowing Christ (Phil 3:8). In fact, compared with knowing Jesus Christ, all things are as rubbish.

9) I live but no longer I. It is not me who lives but Christ who lives in me. The life Paul now lives in the flesh he lives by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself for him. Faith places Paul in Jesus Christ, in particular, on his own cross in total identification with Christ. It is the Exchanged Life. Christ takes our life and gives us His life, His capacity to live. Our life depends upon what we are living for. We can have a small life because we have small goals. We will only wade in life's shallow water. We are afraid of anything beyond the safe and familiar. We cling to the known. We are trapped by our own picture of our self. Jesus Christ gives us new life: new arrangements for living, new places to go, new experiences to have and a new identity to wear. We put on the new man (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10). We have a new capacity for the deeper things of life. We may not go to another place but we start to live in a much deeper way. We hear cries and sounds we never heard before. We see sights, meet needs and know situations that we never knew existed because Christ takes us there. Crucifixion shakes me to the core of my being. It is being refined by fire. It is intended to be so. We

are carrying too much stuff in our life. We are weighed down by the accumulation of life's things: experiences, memories, resentments, opportunities for bitterness, possessions, attachments and wealth. Paul got to the place where he could regard all this as rubbish for the excellence of the Christ alternative.

10) I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness is by the law then Christ died for no purpose. If being right with God (acceptable in God's eyes) depends upon our efforts and our success in satisfying certain religious and ethical standards then there was no reason for Christ's death. The crucifixion is then rendered an exercise in total futility. This applies not only to the crucifixion of Calvary but also the living crucifixion of the disciple in carrying their cross. The point of crucifixion is to get us beyond (or out of) ourselves. Righteousness (being right) by the law (emphasising self and its accomplishments) binds us to ourselves and the power of our self image. The grace of God comes to us through the free gift of the Christian life and the hope in God made possible by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The call is to give up our own thing and pursue the thing of Christ. It is essential to understand that the life God offers in Christ is free and at no stage is it under our control or determination. I am responsible to move when the Holy Spirit moves. I must be faithful to the revelation God gives, the call He places on my life and the urgency He creates in my spirit. 'Woe to me if I preach not the gospel' (1Cor 9:16).

Paul sums up his experience in Christ by saying that he is crucified with Him. He is (and wants to be) nailed to Jesus Christ. This means that he has chosen to divest himself of all that he has clung to for significance and life, and he begs God to make him relevant to the new community of faith and to the eternal purposes revealed by and laid up for him (and us) in Jesus Christ.