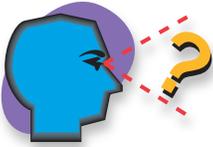


Galatians



Responses to the Questions



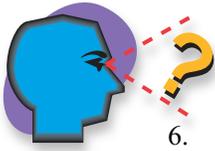
NOTE: BE SURE TO RESPOND TO ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THESE RESPONSES IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

THE THREAT OF A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

Gal. 1:1-10

1. Paul wants to establish two things in the very first line of his letter—that he is an apostle and that his apostleship was received directly from God through Jesus Christ. His was not a human appointment; it was divine in origin.
2. Grace is the pure, unmerited favor of God on undeserving men. Peace is what results when men act on that grace and humbly receive the gift of life from God. God’s life in us ends our rebellion against Him. It also enables us to love and forgive others. To greet someone in the words “grace and peace” is an abbreviated way of saying, “May you live in the gift of God’s love and forgiveness, free from anxiety, fear, and strife.” Truly it is a summation of Christ’s redemptive work and man’s active faith in and obedience to it.
3. An evil age is one in which people have chosen wickedness over righteousness. It is one in which the true God is not acknowledged, so that every kind of sin is not only committed but approved of (see Rom. 1:18-32 for an explicit description of an evil age). There is a distinction, however, between an evil age and an evil world. Paul doesn’t say the world is evil, because it isn’t. God made the world, and it is good. There is evil in the world and the world suffers from the punishment on sin, just as people do, but we should maintain that the world itself is good. The fact that Jesus became a man to deliver us from evil actually confirms that human life in this world is a *good* thing, worthy of His sacrifice.
4. This is the only one of Paul’s epistles that doesn’t have a form of thanksgiving for the church to whom he writes. Even his letters to Corinth, which was a church with many difficult problems, begin with Paul giving thanks for their Christian testimony. The absence of that kind of thanksgiving in this letter is a clear indication that Paul was deeply concerned about the problem he was addressing. In the case of Corinth, Paul had to teach the Christians how to live the truth of the gospel and avoid sin. In his letter to the churches of Galatia, his concern is over heresy. Sin threatens the life of truth; heresy threatens truth itself.
5. Paul believes the Galatians are being tempted to accept a perverted gospel. It was Paul himself who first delivered the gospel to them, so he knows they correctly received the truth about the grace of God. They seem to be ready to turn from what they heard from him and embrace something new (which really means turning away from God, as he states in vs. 6).





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

6. Paul says emphatically that the gospel cannot be changed or altered in any way. He calls down judgment on anyone, including himself, who tampers with the Good News of Jesus Christ. Paul makes it clear that the apostolic preaching of the gospel is not personality-specific. Rather, there is a body of truth about Jesus that must be passed on, and it must remain absolutely fixed. Not even Paul himself can amend it. This is what the Catholic Church refers to as the “sacred deposit of faith,” which is preserved in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition. The Church continues to this day to maintain Paul’s adamant position that no human (or even angelic!) being can add to or take away from the gospel. The *Magisterium* of the Church is charged with preserving this deposit through all the ages until the return of the Lord (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 74-100).

7. Anyone who puts himself under a curse if he alters God’s word cannot really be considered a man-pleaser! Paul shows in the words he uses about what happens to those, even himself, who would make any changes in the gospel that he is not afraid to use strong language and seem offensive if the truth requires it. We know from the many beatings and imprisonments he suffered throughout his ministry that he was willing to say things that angered people. In fact, anyone who speaks in the name of Christ and serves Him runs the risk of seeming offensive to sinners. The Good News of the gospel actually begins as bad news—that men are helpless to save themselves from God’s righteous justice, which must punish sin. The gospel always includes a call to humility and repentance, which some find insulting and offensive.

8. Paul understood that the best way to communicate the gospel to men is to do just what Jesus did to communicate God’s love and truth to us. As Jesus became one of us, so Paul is ready to fully enter into the lives of those to whom he wishes to preach the gospel. This is not the same as being a “man pleaser,” which suggests avoiding saying or doing things to which men might object. The importance of a magisterial form of teaching is crucial in the dilemma of knowing what can be changed and what cannot, as we will see when we study the Council of Jerusalem in the next lesson. We cannot trust our convictions or spiritual feelings to tell us what is unchangeable. Only the wisdom of the Church and the charism of Truth given to her by the Holy Spirit can make that clear.

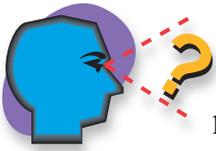
9. Answers will vary. There is a severity in the way Paul writes that strikes modern man as harsh. Indeed, some even within the Church become confused over whether our primary call to love (see I Cor. 13) should mean that we don’t pass judgment on the behavior of others. Surely we don’t judge the state of souls in men, but “the Church which received the office of safeguarding the deposit of faith along with the apostolic duty of teaching, likewise possess the right and duty of proscribing [...] opinions that are known to be opposed to the doctrine of the faith” (Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, chap. 4). Paul took that seriously, as does the Church today.

PAUL’S UNIQUE APOSTLESHIP

Gal. 1:11-end

10. In defense of his apostolic work, Paul reiterates what he said earlier, but with more details. His knowledge of the gospel came through direct, private revelation from Jesus. This is of great importance to Paul, as he considers himself to have the same kind of authority as the Twelve, who knew Jesus personally and had received from Him the sacred deposit of faith. Some of his opponents might have suggested that his knowledge of the gospel wasn’t firsthand, implying that his authority was open to question. Paul counters with this emphasis on revelation—his *was* a firsthand (albeit mystical) knowledge of the gospel.





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

11. The great prophets, Isaiah and Jeremiah, the beloved King of Israel, David, and the forerunner of Jesus, John the Baptist, all were said to be known by God before they were born (see Isa. 49:1; Jer. 1:5; Ps. 22:9; Luke 1:15). This is strong biblical testimony to the humanity of babies in the womb.
12. The call of God always comes as a result of God's unmerited favor. These instances of people known and set apart by God from the womb graphically demonstrate the true nature of grace—in our weakness, with absolutely nothing to offer, God makes us His own. The doctrine of grace is very much the theme of this letter to the Galatians, so Paul illustrates it in as many ways as a writer can. This reference to God's call from the womb is no small detail in Paul's appeal to the Gentiles to understand the nature of grace. He is actually using himself as a vivid example of how the call of God works.
13. Many scholars believe that it was during this time of solitude that Paul received his many private revelations of Jesus and the gospel he was appointed to preach (see II Cor. 12:1-10 for a reference to a time of intense private revelation in Paul's life).
14. Paul wanted to visit Cephas (Peter). He spent fifteen days with him and saw none of the other apostles but James, the Lord's "brother" (in the language that Jesus and the apostles spoke, Aramaic, there is no word for "cousin," which was the actual relationship between Jesus and James, so the word "brother" is used to denote close blood kinship). It is clear from this sequence of events that Paul had received from the Lord the truth that the other apostles already knew: Peter was the leader of this new church. It was very important to Paul, as we will see in the next chapter, to have Peter's support of his apostleship. It is interesting to note that although all the apostles are alive and active at this time in Paul's life, there is one who leads, with a special kind of role—Peter.
15. Paul writes with a deep sense of urgency. He wants his readers to believe every word he says. One can feel the gravity that characterizes this letter in Paul's mind. Something of incredible importance is at stake here.
16. As Paul says, early on in his ministry he wasn't known by sight in the churches of Judea, which would be the region around Jerusalem. They only knew the story of his dramatic conversion. He is perhaps making reference to his reputation as a reminder of his credibility as a preacher of the true gospel. Only a divine act could explain Paul's new life. He was a person worth listening to.
17. Answers will vary. In addition to his passion and zeal, we know that Paul was sensitive to criticism, somewhat defensive, and sincere in his concern for his friends. As the letter proceeds, his personality will continue to come into clearer focus.

