Intro

We have recently completed a sermon series on Galatians and, for our online friends we offer a brief summary for some of the themes that we have discovered and explored.
We hope you find these helpful as a devotional resource to explore and deepen faith as a follower of Jesus, Son of God.

Chapter 1

Paul begins with a proclamation that is common to his normal introductions but with an added twist "sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead" (1:1 NIV)

Why say this? It's a bit of a teaser to tell them the problems he is addressing.

Two Problems

One, Paul was being accused of being a second-rate prophet and without the authority of the Peter, James & John who, by that time were recognised as the leaders of the church of God.

Two, the followers of Jesus were being persuaded by the alternative teaching that put more faith in the historical law-of-Moses than the relationship between God and his people that was meant to be at the heart of applying the law. (e.g. Hosea 6:6 on the Old Testament which was quoted by Jesus in Matt.9:13)

His letter is loaded with many bold statements and reprovals and, just before he explains the authority he has, Paul grabs his readers attention by saying, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ". He is sad and upset that the believers in Galatia, many of whom he knows personally and regularly prays for, are turning away from his teaching because it means they are turning away from both him and Jesus.

What follows is not a gentle pastoral letter but a letter that seeks to correct their understanding of the gospel. He does show his love within it using various phrases but, if a modern church pastor were to speak to their congregation in such a way I am confident there would be an outcry and accusations of being too hard on them!

This immediately highlights a different culture of Paul's time compared to what we are familiar with today. However, bear with him and the picture of his earnest love for them to remain 'free in Christ' (that gets explored later in the series) will become more obvious.

On whose authority?

The remainder of chapter 1 and chapter 2 focus on Paul's answer.

In effect Paul says, you are right I was not commissioned by Peter! (whom he called Cephas)

Paul relies on and makes his appeal to a higher authority, the direct revelation by Jesus himself! He makes the point that he was well-schooled in the scriptures and was part of a movement that sought to enforce Moses-law, known as Judaism.*

Paul makes a small reference to the revelation and call of Jesus happening to him on the road to Damascus, just sufficiently enough to jog their memories for they already knew the fuller story. (You can read the fuller story in Acts 9).

(* For the deeper studiers: In Paul's day that title referenced a zealous, law-based movement within the beliefs of the Jewish people that was pursued by the Pharisees. It did not signify a stand-alone 'religion' that encompasses all Jewish culture.[i] For example, another group called the Sadducees pursued a different way of preserving Jewish culture that focussed on collaboration with the Roman authorities.

Paul was not converted from his 'Pharisee-ways' as such but shown how he was mis-reading God's word of scripture and how Jesus -the one speaking directly to him – had fulfilled the 'law and prophets'. He held the same beliefs in the creator God but now understood scripture and Jesus' part in them as God revealed in human form.[ii])

Even that revelation was not the sole basis of his authority. After a short time in Damascus, he makes a trip down to Arabia (1:17) and then spends a further three-years in Damascus before going to see Peter (Cephas) in Jerusalem (1:18-19) and doesn't see him again for many more years (2:1)!

(* For the deeper studiers: Why Arabia? Here, we find Mount Sinai, famous for Elijah's meeting with God when he fled from Jezebel and as the mount on which Moses was given God's law for his people. Paul had begun telling the Jewish community at

Damascus about his Jesus-experience and new-found understanding of who Jesus is. However, he still takes time out to go and spend a quiet time of reflection to seek God's confirmation and direction.[iii]

Limits of leaders

In chapter 2, Paul reinforces his authority as coming directly from God. Having told them that God shows no favouritism toward leaders (2:6) he given an example of when he corrected the great Apostle, Peter!
Paul does not share it to embarrass Peter but to remind them

(1) his appeal of authority remains to Jesus and
(2) even leaders who stray from gospel-truth are not given special privilege of exemption but disciplined by God.

Summary

- Paul agrees he was not commissioned by Peter or any other of the apostles.
- Instead, he has the same authority as Peter because he was commissioned directly by Jesus and God the Father (1:1, 1:16, 1:17).
- Paul makes an earnest please to the Galatians, a people he is invested in, to return to their commission that comes from Jesus.
- Paul examples that leaders must remain true to the gospel and examples a how he alerted Peter to his error (2:6-14). (We know from Peter's letter (2Pet.3:15) that Peter took this well and corrected the error)

Our Challenges for reflection

A reminder that everyone who has responded to Jesus' call in their life is directly commissioned by him.

- ➢ Do we truly seek Jesus' direction in our life or are we still trying to make him fit our own plans?
- ➢ How resistant are we to being appropriately corrected by Jesus and/or our church pastor / a church leader?
- ➢ How might we deepen our relationship with Jesus and his people by discovering (or rediscovering) what his call in our life is?

[i] Tom Wright, *Paul, A Biography* (London: SPCK, 2020), pp.3-4.
[ii] Wright, pp.53-54.
[iii] Wirght, p.64.