

Galatians 1:1-5

Grace to You, Glory to God

Today we begin a series in the apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians. The reason I have decided to teach from this letter is that I believe God wills that we rekindle the fire in our hearts for the good news. The gospel or good news was under attack in Galatia. And it is always under attack. And the weapon that is always used is this—"Faith in Jesus Christ is good, but to be truly saved and spiritually mature you need something more."

But here is what we really need. We need to be broken by the cross and then healed by God's Spirit. Galatians exalts these two truths: faith in the work of Christ as the only way to be right with God, and the Holy Spirit as the power to obey God and to mature spiritually.

On his first missionary journey the apostle Paul traveled with his companion Barnabas into the province of Galatia, which is now modern day Turkey. You can read about this first missionary journey in Acts 13 and 14. But almost as soon as these churches were born they were attacked by false teachers who challenged Paul's authority to teach and who wanted to put the chains of Old Testament legalism and ritual on the believers.

Therefore, right in the first five verses of this letter the two main themes are stated. One is Paul's apostleship and his authority to set Christian doctrine. The other is the actual content of the gospel: we are saved by God's grace alone, by faith in Christ alone and empowered by the Spirit alone to live lives of faith, hope and love. We will look at the first five verses in general and then in detail. So let's begin.

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), ² and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.
(Galatians 1:1-5)

Here are the main ideas of this passage of Scripture. In verse 1, Paul declares his authority as an apostle who was not commissioned by ordinary people. Paul was called and made an apostle by God through Jesus Christ. In verse 2, all the believers who were with Paul join him in this letter. This letter will set forth the true gospel, there is no other. And other believers stand with Paul.

Then verses three to five can be summed up like this: grace has come to you and glory is going to God for the Lord Jesus Christ has died for our sins and has freed us from this present evil age according the will of God. Now, let's dig deeper.

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead),
(Galatians 1:1)

Paul's authority to teach Christian truth was being attacked by false teachers; we'll see this later in the letter). So Paul declares "I am an apostle, not an imposter!" The word "apostle" was clearly defined at this time. It meant a special ambassador or emissary who was sent with full authority to speak for the group or person who sent him.

Jesus Christ used the term "apostle" for his special representatives.¹ From the general group of disciples Christ chose twelve men to be his ambassadors and sent them out to preach the good news of salvation and the coming kingdom of God. It was to this handpicked team that Paul claimed he belonged.

In a general sense there were also apostles sent by churches to represent the local church in some way.² But Paul states quite powerfully that he was not in that category. His apostolic authority was not from mere men or any organization. It was the risen Lord Jesus who ordained Paul. One must have seen the risen Lord Jesus Christ to be an apostle.³

This is why Paul writes of God raising Jesus Christ up from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the heart and soul of Christianity. Only a living Christ can save us from sin. Only a living Christ can empower us. Only a living Christ can bring us into life and glory.

¹ Matthew 10:2

² 2 Corinthians 8:25; Philippians 2:25

³ Acts 1:21, 22; 9:1-6; 26:12-18; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:8, 9

The apostles were a unique group of men whose authority cannot be repeated. So there are no apostolic successors today, except for the faithful teaching of the apostles' doctrine in the New Testament.

So Paul's heart was on fire as he defended his special status as an apostle, not to brag, but because the Word of God that he taught was at stake. If Paul were an imposter then people could reject what he taught. That is what the false teachers in Galatia were claiming. And there are Bible teachers today who read sections of New Testament Scripture today that they do not like and they will say "Well, that's just Paul's opinion. I see things differently. We live in different times. We have a different culture and society than when Paul wrote. So we can change Christian teaching to fit our modern values and ideas."

We have no authority to do that! The apostles had God ordained authority to represent God and Jesus Christ. Jesus said of his apostles,

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.
(John 13:20)

Therefore we may not place our ideas and teachings and principles of salvation and Christian maturity over the apostles' teaching in the New Testament. So Paul identifies himself and defends himself in verse 1. Then in verse 2 he says this letter is not just from him, but also from all the believers who are with him.

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), ² and all the brethren who are with me,
(Galatians 1:1-2a)

Becoming a Christian brings us into the family of God, into a fellowship with other believers. Can you be a Christian and not be a part of a local church? Yes and no. You can stand alone and not be a member of a church, but you will waste your God given gifts. You will never be loved and ministered to. You will never enjoy the sweet blessings of being part of a fellowship who will pray for you and encourage you. And you will never fully and fruitfully mature in your faith. Proverbs 20:17 in The Message states, "You use steel to sharpen steel and one friend to sharpen another."

Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), ² and

all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

³ Grace to you and peace from God
the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,
(Galatians 1:1-3)

Paul's words here are more than a simple greeting. They sum up for us all that God has done and is doing for us in Christ. The first idea in the meaning of "grace" is beauty and goodness. The second idea is that of undeserved generosity. It is as if the apostle said "May the beauty and goodness and undeserved love of God be with you now and always."

The source of salvation and healing is God's grace—His favor and lovingkindness to save sinners. Salvation is not by any works that we may do. It is by faith in what God has freely done for us in Jesus Christ. And the result of this grace is peace, peace with God, peace in our hearts and peace with one another.

I read a news story about a pregnant, unwed teen aged named Maddi Runkles. Her private Christian high school refused to allow her to participate in the graduation ceremony. That was shame enough. But what really scared Maddi was telling her father, a pastor, that she was pregnant. The day she finally had the courage to tell her dad, something extraordinary happened. Her father's shoulders sagged and he hung his head.

They sat in silence for what seemed an hour as Maddi's anxiety and shame grew as she feared her dad's anger. When he finally raised his head, he had tears in his eyes. And he said, "Honey, I am so disappointed in you." Now Maddi hung her head and cried.

Then her father said, "It won't be easy, and there will be struggles and a hard path ahead of you. But I love you, and now I figure I've been given more to love." Then her dad stood up and put his arms around Maddi. She cried and a wave of peace filled her heart. In the article Maddi said she finally understood and word she had heard all her life—grace.⁴

The great historical event that displayed God's grace to us was the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. We do not have to bear any guilt or shame, because our Lord Jesus Christ bore those things for us on the cross.

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⁴ Fox News online August 26, 2017

Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (Galatians 1:3, 4)

There can be no Christianity without the cross of Christ. Here is the fundamental fact of our faith. Our sins are not forgiven because we are sorry for them. They are atoned for in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. God laid on him the iniquity of us all. And old hymn states,

Oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great redeemer's praise.
The glories of my Lord and King, the triumphs of His grace.
He breaks the power of canceled sin, He sets the prisoner free.
His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood availed for me.⁵

No ritual, no salty tears, no work, no self-sacrifice, can free me from sin and the destructive destiny of the world, only the grace of God in Jesus Christ. And we are not only forgiven of our sins, we are delivered from this present evil age. What does this mean?

The Bible divides all of history into two stages: there is this age and the one to come. This age is ruled and manipulated by Satan, whom Scripture calls the "god of this age."⁶ This present age is evil, because sin and Satan has such a grip on our lives, our society and our institutions. And so this present evil age calls good evil and evil good. This Satanic grip is revealed in Ephesians 2.

And you *He made alive*, who were dead in trespasses and sins, ² in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, ³ among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.
(Ephesians 2:1, 2)

What these verses are telling us is that the world's values and ideologies that are apart from God are like jail cells or fortresses in which the minds and

⁵ Charles Wesley

⁶ 2 Corinthians 4:4

hearts of people are imprisoned. They are locked into a way of thinking that is the opposite of God's good will. 1 John 5:19 tells us that the whole world lies in the grip of the wicked one. And God's purpose now is not to take us out of this world or age, but to rescue us from its power and influence.

As we learn God's Word, as we live by the power of His Spirit, we we experience God's will and His love, Hebrews 6:5 says "we have tasted of the powers of the age to come." Already the age to come overlaps this one in our lives. This is why 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

The new age with its new joys and new love and new power has broken into this evil age. For those of us in Christ a liberation has begun to take place. And so in this age we are to be salt and light bringing hope to others who long to be rescued.

This evil age and all who belong to it will pass away and be destroyed. Paul tells us in 2 Thessalonians that those who do evil and those who do not obey the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer "everlasting destruction." Peter informs us in 2 Peter 3 that the heavens and the earth that are now will be destroyed by fervent heat. There is not eternal torment in hell. There is either life or death—everlasting life or everlasting death. Romans 6:23 declares that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is everlasting life in Jesus Christ.

So we have been rescued, delivered from this evil age and its doom. Therefore loose yourselves from this world. Don't allow it to shape how you think or feel. Don't allow it to train your fears or your hope.

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:3-5)

We have been rescued according to the will of God our Father. We were not the ones begging for rescue, God offered help to us first. To live in the will of God brings a sense of direction and destiny to our lives. We have a guarantee of belonging to that which is permanent. This world and all that is in it will pass away.⁷ But God is forever and we are in the will of God!

⁷ 1 John 2:15-17

Our hearts can be comforted not so much by what we hold as true, as necessary as that is, but by the fact that the True One holds us.⁸ We are safe in God alone through faith in Christ alone. This is why there is no ritual and no law that can anything of value to our salvation in Jesus Christ. Grace comes to us so that glory may go to God. Amen.

⁸ 1 Peter 1:5