

**Galatians 1:1-5**—“<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— <sup>2</sup>and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: <sup>3</sup>Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup>who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup>to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

### Introduction:

The letter was probably written around AD 48-49.

Perhaps the biggest question surrounding this book is what is meant by “Galatia”? There are two possible answers. During the time which Paul wrote Galatians the term “Galatia” had acquired two meanings:

**North Galatia:** It was used in an ethnographical sense. When used this way it denoted the old Galatic region in the central plateau of Asia Minor originally inhabited by the Gauls, that is North Galatia.

**South Galatia:** It was also used as a political division. In this sense it referred to the whole of the Roman province called Galatia—South Galatia.



### The Problem of the Galatian Church

Paul had gone to the region of Galatia and there planted churches (see Acts 13 & 14). Shortly after leaving some men came into the church and taught the new converts that unless they were circumcised according to the Law of Moses they could not be saved (cf. Acts. 15). These “Judaizers,” as they were called, sought to impose upon the Galatians circumcision and observance of the law as conditions necessary for full Christian status.

### **Galatians 1:1-5**—“<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle—

As he normally does, Paul uses his Roman name (rather than his Jewish name, Saul).

Paul claims for himself the very title which the false teachers were apparently denying him.

**Cole:** “To the Jew the word was well defined; it meant a special messenger, with a special status, enjoying an authority and commission that came from a body higher than himself.”<sup>1</sup>

The word ‘messenger’ is literally *apostolos*: a messenger, one sent on a mission, an apostle.

Put simply, the term Apostle is two major senses:

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<sup>1</sup> R. Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* in the *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Tyndale Press, 1965), 31.

One who is sent by Jesus himself (e.g., the twelve, Paul)

Apostle

One who is sent by another (e.g., the church in Philippi, etc.)

apostle

**sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ**

Paul is already hitting upon one of the key issues that the Judiazers were attacking—his apostolic authority.

In essence, they were claiming that Paul was preaching a sub-Christian gospel; not the true gospel that came from Peter, James and John (all Jews, who preached within a Jewish milieu). That is, the Judiazers were (probably) tracing his authorization back to the church of Antioch from where he had come. And, more significantly, they presented themselves as standing in succession with the Jerusalem apostles and their fully authentic gospel.

Paul will develop this more a bit later, but for now just note verses 11 & 2: “<sup>1</sup>I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something)g that man made up. <sup>2</sup>I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

**Fung:** “The emphatic contrast with which Paul describes his apostleship is intended to underline its divine origin: he asserts that his apostolic commission, with regard to both its source and its mediation, was from God and Christ, just as a little later on he will categorically declare that his gospel, with regard to both its source and the manner in which it was communicated to him, was a direct revelation from God (1:12, 16).”<sup>2</sup>

**Stott:** “We may not exalt our opinions over theirs or claim that our authority is as great as theirs. For their opinions and authority are Christ’s. If we would bow to His authority, we must therefore bow to theirs. As He Himself said, ‘he who receives you receives me’ (Mt. 10:49; Jn. 13:20).”<sup>3</sup>

**and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—**

The apostle envisaged the Father and the Son as a joint source of grace and peace.<sup>4</sup>

Now back to Paul and the brothers...

**<sup>2</sup>and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: <sup>3</sup>Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,**

Paul changes the normal greeting in ancient letter writing:

Rather than “*chairein*” (“greetings”) he writes *Charis hymin* (“grace to you”).

*Eirene* (“peace”) denoted a state of wholeness.

These two terms are related to each other as root and fruit, or cause and effect.

In other words, we do different things with words. For example, often what we do with words is simply describe a certain state of affairs. “The cat is on the mat.” That sentence is simply descriptive. However, what about this sentence: “With this ring I thee wed.” Here, we are not so much describing a state of affairs as we are actually doing something with our words—we are wedding. All this to say, that when Paul writes “grace and peace to you” he is not merely

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<sup>2</sup> Ronald Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians in The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 36.

<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 16.

<sup>4</sup> M.J. Harris, NIDNTT III: 1178.

offering a customary greeting, nor is he describing a state of affairs. Rather, he is actually imparting grace and peace to the Galatians.<sup>5</sup>

**Fung:** “The words ‘grace and peace to you’ express perhaps not so much a pious wish as an act of impartation which is accomplished through the apostle’s declaration, in much the same way as, when the commissioned disciples of Jesus pronounced ‘peace to this house.’”<sup>6</sup>

Common terms with tremendous theological substance.

Those two terms summarize Paul’s gospel of salvation.

The nature of the gospel is peace or reconciliation—peace with God.

The source of salvation is grace, God’s free favor, irrespective of human merit or works.

**Paul Carlisle and Jon Walker:** “In fact, I would say that one way to distinguish the difference between Grace and Mercy is that Grace costs while Mercy does not. Mercy says, “I won’t press charges.” Grace says, “I not only won’t press charges, I’ll pay for your rehab program.”<sup>7</sup>

#### **<sup>4</sup>who gave himself for our sins**

This was a tradition expression for the death of martyrs among the Jews and soldiers among the Greeks.

The death of Jesus Christ was not primarily a display of love, nor an example of heroism, but a sacrifice for sin.

**Anselm:** “Man the sinner owes to God, on account of sin, what he cannot repay, and unless he repays it he cannot be saved.”<sup>8</sup>

**Calvin:** “It was necessary therefore for Christ “to undergo the severity of God’s vengeance, to appease his wrath and satisfy his just judgment.”<sup>9</sup>

**The Cross of Christ:** “We [must] realize that it is he himself in his inner being who needs to be satisfied, and, not something external to himself.”<sup>10</sup>

**James Montgomery Boice** “...if the death of Christ on the cross is the true meaning of the Incarnation, then there is no gospel without the cross. Christmas by itself is no gospel. The life of Christ is no gospel. Even the resurrection, important as it is in the total scheme of things, is no gospel by itself. For the good news is not just that God became man, nor that God has spoken to reveal a proper way of life for us, or even that death, the great enemy, is conquered. Rather, the good news is that sin has been dealt with (of which the resurrection is a proof); that Jesus has suffered its penalty for us as our representative, so that we might never have to suffer it; and that therefore all who believe in him can look forward to heaven.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For further information on what we do with words see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). Or for a more complex handling of the subject see John Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969)

<sup>6</sup> Fung, 39.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Carlisle and Jon Walker, *Pastors.com*, Issue #98, 4/16/2003.

<sup>8</sup> Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo?*, i.xxv.

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, II.xvi.10.

<sup>10</sup> John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 123.

<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice *The Centrality of the Cross*, <http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/9170/BOICE3.HTM>

**Emil Brunner:** “The dualism of holiness and love...of mercy and wrath cannot be dissolved... [it is the] dialectic of all genuine Christian theology.”<sup>12</sup>

**William Temple:** “All is of God; the only thing of my very own which I contribute to my redemption is the sin from which I need to be redeemed.”<sup>13</sup>

**to rescue us from the present evil age,**

**J.B. Lightfoot:** The verb ‘rescue’ or ‘deliver’ “strikes the keynote of the epistle...The Gospel is a rescue...an emancipation from a state of bondage.”<sup>14</sup>

It is the term used in Acts of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery (7:34).

With the warning about not desiring to ‘go back’ to the slavery of Egypt.

The Bible divides history into two ages: “this age’ and ‘the age to come.’

It tells us that “the age to come” has already been inaugurated.

It is very similar to when the Bible describes “this world” (*kosmos*) in the writings of John.

“It denotes not only the current era of world history but the way of life that characterizes it.”<sup>15</sup>

The purpose of Christ’s death, therefore, was not only to bring us forgiveness, but that, having been forgiven, we should live a new life, the life of the age to come.

**according to the will of our God and Father,**

Note that the primary concern of Paul here is not *your* need or *my* need. Rather it is God’s purpose and his glory.

**Fung:** “It can be seen, therefore, that the point of departure for Paul’s thought is not the individual’s need and experience, but Christ’s epoch-making redemptive work, the primary significance of which is *objective*: it rescues believers out of the present evil age or aeon and brings them into a new aeon, a new order of existence, subject to a different power. Its *subjective* significance for believers consists in the fact that, having been thus objectively delivered out of the present aeon, they need no longer be dominated by the evil spiritual powers of this age, but may (and must) live in newness of life in the new order of existence...”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>5</sup>**to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.**

This verse in the original Greek has no verb. Glory is a basic attribute of God (just as “power belongs to God” is more of an appropriate phrase than “power be to God”). Therefore the idea seems to be “Glory belongs to God.”

The description of this glory as being ‘forever and ever’ implies that in eternity glory will be comprised of endless successive generations, and that wisdom, holiness and love will continue to be a fundamental aspect of God’s glory. Compare

**Ephesians 2: 6-7**—<sup>6</sup>“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, <sup>7</sup>in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”

I would summarize this passage like this:

I, Paul, am an apostle precisely because Jesus Christ Himself, personally (not through someone or something), called me to this role. Therefore, with all of the various brothers with me, and on behalf of God himself, I impart to you God’s gracious favor and His reconciling peace to you

<sup>12</sup> Emil Brunner, *The Mediator*, 519.

<sup>13</sup> William Temple, as quoted by Stott, 197.

<sup>14</sup> J.B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Oliphants, 1957), 73.

<sup>15</sup> Manson, Paul and John, 26.

<sup>16</sup> Fung, 42.

who are in the Churches of the southern province of Galatia. Glory belongs to God unto the age of ages because Christ sacrificed himself for our sins to pull us out of the present evil situation.

**Application:**

**The gospel is meant to be glorious.** It should take your breath away again and again. This is the reason I try again and again to get you to see and experience the magnitude and the beauty of the Gospel. It should produce inside of you a conscious and worshipful experience of God's supremacy in the use of your mind, together with an intentional display of this supremacy in all of your work.

To those who are stunned by the glory of God in the Gospel a steady diet of psychological soothing, practical how to's, and relational therapies gets very thin and somehow seems very inauthentic. It gives the impression that we aren't talking about the real thing?

**Jonathan Edwards:** "God is glorified not only by His glory's being seen, but by its being rejoiced in. When those that see it delight in it, God is more glorified than if they only see it."<sup>17</sup>

**Edwards:** "[The] glory of God [does not] consist merely in the creature's perceiving his perfections: for the creature may perceive the power and wisdom of God, and yet take no delight in it, but abhor it. Those creatures that so do, don't glorify God. Nor doth the glory of God consist especially in speaking of his perfections: for words avail not any otherwise than as they express the sentiment of the mind. This glory of God, therefore, [consists] in the creature's admiring and rejoicing [and] exulting in the manifestation of his beauty and excellency...The essence of glorifying...God consists, therefore, in the creature's rejoicing in God's manifestations of his beauty."<sup>18</sup>

"In July 1995, my wife, Noel, two of our children, and I huddled on the floor, away from all windows, under the direct path of Hurricane Erin in Pensacola, Florida. One magnificent old pine tree sheared off the corner of our bedroom as it fell. During the eye of the storm we walked outside in a perfect calm to see the devastation. Then, about twenty minutes later, we hid again against the backside of the storm as it brought down chimneys and crushed cars under snapped-off oak limbs as thick as hundred-year-old trees.

*God strolled the beach—Our legs and faces could not bear the piercing, blasting sand.*

*God stepped ashore—Palms waved, scattering branches in his path*

*God strode inland—Magnolias, pines, and oaks,  
Who'd stretched one hundred years toward God,  
Fell to the ground before him.*

*God stood and breathed—*

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<sup>17</sup> As quoted in John Piper, *The Dangerous Duty of Delight: The Glorified God and the Satisfied Soul* (Sisters: Multnomah, 2001).

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Edwards, "Nothing Upon Earth Can Represent the Glories of Heaven," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 14, ed. Kenneth Minkema (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1997), 144.

*While we—in dark, closed closet—  
Feared to face his glory.”<sup>19</sup>*

**The Gospel is designed to change you.** The purpose of the Gospel is not *simply* to enamor you with the horizons of God’s great wealth and vastness. It is also designed to change you through gazing upon those horizons. Christ died to rescue you from this present evil age. Therefore the goal of the gospel is to conform you to the image of Christ. Nothing less will do. So what do you do then? At this point, I would say the answer is simply to gaze upon those ‘horizons’ of God’s lavish magnitude and glory in Christ. As we gaze upon Christ we will be changed (2 Cor. 3: 18).

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<sup>19</sup> John Piper, *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 49-50.