

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON THREE)

GALATIANS 1:1-5

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

1 From Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor by human agency, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead)

2 and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Last week we mentioned that the opening words of Paul's letter to the Galatian believers clearly indicate that he is in a combative mood. As we noted in our **Introduction**, Paul wrote this letter to counter the erroneous, legalistic teaching of the Judaizers which was undermining the central New Testament doctrine of **justification by faith alone**. The doctrine of the Judaizers was a mixture of grace and works. They tried to enforce circumcision and the keeping of the Mosaic Law upon the Gentile converts to Christianity. In this endeavor they were strenuously opposed by the Apostle Paul, who used several of his epistles to refute their pernicious doctrine.

The Judaizers recognized Paul to be the chief exponent of the Gospel of grace and they therefore continually sought to undermine his work. One

of the methods they employed was that of depreciating his apostolic authority. They argued that Paul was not one of the original Twelve, he had not personally listened to Christ's voice, he had not seen Christ, he had not attended on Christ's earthly ministry, and he had not been sent out like them at Christ's express command. Furthermore, they said that he had not received the Gospel by direct revelation from Christ as had the others, but had learned of it from the Twelve.

Paul was very much aware of the efforts of the Judaizers to undermine his ministry among the Galatian believers, and he therefore asserts his apostolic authority as soon as he commences his letter. In verse 1 he writes, "*From Paul, an apostle (not from men, nor by human agency, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead)*"

Paul refers to himself as an "*apostle.*" By the addition of the title "apostle" to his name, Paul claims, at the very beginning of his letter, to be one who is divinely commissioned to preach the Gospel and authorized to propagate Christianity.

The word "*apostle*" is the translation of a Greek word which refers to the act of sending someone on a commission to represent the sender. It was used of a delegate or messenger, one sent forth with orders. Our word ambassador would be a good translation. The word, as Paul uses it here, does not merely refer to one who has a message to announce, but to an appointed representative with an official status who is provided with the credentials of his office.

In stating that his apostleship was "*not from men, nor by human agency,*" Paul is saying unequivocally that his apostleship did not come from human beings as its ultimate source. The source of his apostleship was not human but divine in character. Not only does Paul say that his apostleship did not find its ultimate source in man, but he says it did not find its intermediate source in man. Human beings were not even the agents of God in conferring his apostleship on him. Thus he distinguishes himself from the false apostles who derived their commissions from men and not from God.

Paul says that he was called to be an apostle “*by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.*” Here Paul makes the bold claim that his apostolic call and appointment were heavenly in origin, from God the Father and the risen Lord Jesus Christ. This is the only direct mention of the resurrection of Christ in the epistle. It emphasizes the importance of that event to Paul’s apostleship, for he was not called during the earthly ministry of the Lord but by the resurrected Christ.

In verse 2 Paul associates himself with others who were aware of the situation in Galatia and were also aware that he was writing his epistle to deal with the situation. He mentions “*all the brothers who are with me.*” He mentions them to show the Galatians that he is not alone in his defence of the Gospel of grace. The word “*all*” indicates that there was a considerable number of his colleagues in the gospel ministry with him at the time. Paul is making it clear to the believers in Galatia that though the letter was composed by him, there were several other prominent brethren who shared his concerns and were in full support of his efforts to neutralize the pernicious legalistic doctrine of the **Judaizers**.

Paul addresses his letter to “*the churches of Galatia.*” The abruptness of the language is remarkable. In his other letters, he always has a word of commendation for the churches to which he is writing. This is so even in the case of the church at Corinth which he was taking severely to task because of the serious disorders within its membership. But he has no word of commendation for the Galatians. He does not even address them as saints, although they were. This shows the extent and seriousness of their desertion from the authentic Gospel. It also reveals the troubled state of the apostle’s mind mixed with his indignation at the actions of his beloved converts. Instead of his usual cordial greeting and commendation, the apostle launches into a description of the substitutionary work of Christ. This at once reveals the main purpose of the letter. The issue between Paul and the Galatians is the significance of Christ’s atoning work at Calvary.

In verse 3 Paul greets the Galatians with his usual salutation, “*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*” but the greeting has special significance in this letter since the recipients were turning away from the grace that had saved and sanctified them to the legalistic works-based teachings of the Judaizers, and as a result were not enjoying the peace of God.

Even this opening greeting directly confronts the false gospel that had spread like leaven through the Galatian churches. The first century apostolic greeting of “Grace and peace” is actually a summary of the Gospel. **Grace**, God’s unmerited favour, is the source of salvation according to **Ephesians 2:8-9**. When a person believes in Jesus Christ, he or she receives salvation and is automatically at **peace** with God (**Romans 5:1**). Thus, **grace** leads to **peace**. In other words, the **grace** of God is the **source** of salvation and **peace** with God is the **result** of salvation.

Dr. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones says that “Grace is the **beginning** of our faith; peace is the **end** of our faith...Grace is the origin and source and fount of everything in the Christian life. But what does the Christian life mean, what is it meant to produce? The answer is ‘peace...’ It is essential for us, therefore, to carry these two words in our minds because within the ellipse formed by grace and peace everything is included.”

The legalistic, works-based system of the Judaizers offered no grace and provided no peace. If a person is justified by works, as these false teachers maintained, then salvation is not of grace and can therefore bring no peace, since we can never be certain that we have performed well enough to be assured of our security in God.

The source of both grace and peace is “*from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*” The word “*from*” is a translation of the Greek preposition **apo**. The names of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ are connected by the one preposition of ultimate source **apo**, thus

indicating that they are the joint source of grace and peace, and that they cooperate in the carrying out of the plan of redemption.

In verse 4 Paul speaks about the work performed by the Lord Jesus Christ on behalf of the believing sinner, thus making salvation available to him or her, without him or her having to perform any work whatsoever. In reference to Christ he writes, *“Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”*

In this verse Paul brings to the attention of the Galatian believers who were practically ignoring the substitutionary character of the atoning death of the Lord Jesus, a declaration of the true basis of their acceptance by God. Paul purposely added these words because the Galatians were falling back on works as the basis of their acceptance by God. The **voluntary** aspect of the death of our Lord is brought out here. He *“gave himself for our sins.”* The preposition *“for”* is a translation of the Greek word is **huper: (hoop-er)**, which speaks of substitution. Thus Paul denounces the works-based religious system of the Judaizers and counters it with the doctrine of the substitutionary atonement which teaches that the Lord Jesus took our place with relation to our sins and gave Himself as the Sacrifice that would perfectly satisfy the just demands of God’s holy law which the human race has violated.

The American theologian, **Phillip Ryken**, mentions four significant truths about the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross highlighted in this verse. **Firstly** he says, it shows the **willingness** of Jesus to go to the Cross. The crucifixion was a **voluntary** self-sacrifice. Jesus gave the most precious gift of all. He *“gave Himself.”*

Secondly, this verse shows the **purpose** of the Cross. The reason Christ gave himself was *“for our sins.”* A transaction took place on the Cross. We were the ones who deserved to die because we owe God an infinite debt for our sin. But Christ took our place on the Cross. He became our substitute, He became our sin-offering. He carried all our sins to the Cross and paid for them with His death. Thus the Crucifixion of Jesus

Christ was not merely an example of supreme sacrifice, but an actual atonement for sin. It enabled God to forgive us by satisfying His justice.

C.H. Spurgeon commenting on **Galatians 1:4** made the following observations: "Who gave himself for our sins — There is the doctrine of the atonement, which Paul always brings into his preaching and writing as soon as he can...Well does Luther say, 'Christ never gave himself for our righteousness; but he gave himself for our sins, because there was no other way of saving us except by a sacrifice for sin.' The substitutionary character of Christ's death is always to be noticed. If our Lord's bearing our sin for us is not the gospel, I have no gospel to preach. The heart of the gospel is redemption, and the essence of redemption is the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ."

Thirdly, the verse shows the **effect** of the Cross. Christ was crucified "*to deliver us from the present evil age.*" When we think of the Cross, we usually think first of the atonement. As we have seen, Christ died to pay for our sins. But Christ was also crucified to deliver us from this evil age.

The word "*deliver*" is the translation of a Greek word which means, "to pluck out, to draw out, to rescue, to deliver." **Kenneth Wuest** explains that the word, "strikes the keynote of the letter. The gospel is a rescue, an emancipation from a state of bondage. The word here denotes, not a removal from, but a rescue from the power of the ethical characteristics of the present age."

Our Lord "*gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.*" The Greek word translated "*evil*" is **ponéros**: (**pon-ay-ros**'), which refers to malignant evil, evil that causes labour, pain, and sorrow. It is evil in active opposition to good. The English word which best translates this Greek word is "pernicious."

Merriam Webster's Dictionary gives the following definition of pernicious: "highly injurious or destructive: deadly."

The **Cambridge Dictionary** provides the following definition: “having a very harmful effect or influence.”

These definitions speak volumes as it relates to the age in which Paul lived as well as the age in which we are living!

Kenneth Wuest remarks that “The outstanding philosophy of religion of this present pernicious age is, that acceptance with Deity is by means of the good works of the individual. Every system of religion except that in the Bible bases salvation upon the good works of the worshipper. The judaizers were part of this present evil age. Their system, not content with dragging down its own devotees to destruction, was attempting to pull down the Christian Church with it. Paul says that the substitutionary atonement of the Lord Jesus is that which will rescue the poor lost sinner from the clutches of the pernicious teachings of the judaizers.”

Fourthly, this verse shows the **origin** of the Cross. Christ died “*according to the will of our God and Father.*” The crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not an unforeseen tragedy; it was not a mere accident of history; it was part of God’s eternal plan for the salvation of sinners. The apostle Peter said as much in **Acts 2:22-23** during his sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man clearly attested to you by God with powerful deeds, wonders, and miraculous signs that God performed among you through him, just as you yourselves know—

*23 this man, who was handed over by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you executed by nailing him to a cross at the hands of Gentiles.*

Brothers and sisters, it is very important for us to understand that the act of Christ delivering us from the present evil age was not according to

our plan, or in proportion to our obedience or because of any quality in us. The act of Christ giving Himself to deliver us was according to the Father's sovereign will, which is the standard of every redemptive operation. This deliverance therefore was according to the procedure prescribed by God the Father. And this is always the case! This means that the salvation procured on the Cross for us by our Lord is to be received by faith aside from any merit of our own. We cannot earn what Christ procured for us. Salvation is given free, it is the gift of God.

God **gave** His only Son (**John 3:16**) and His only Son **gave** His only life out of love for men and women dead in their trespasses and sins and headed for eternal destruction (**Ephesians 5:25**). And in Christ giving of Himself, He was the perfect fulfillment of all the Jewish sin offerings given in the Tabernacle and in the Temple for hundreds of years. Jesus came to be the final, perfect sin offering, to which the entire Old Testament sacrificial system had always been pointing. It is this truth that Paul wants to reinforce to the Galatian believers.

Brothers and sisters, once we really understand and appreciate that Christ gave himself for our sins, we really understand and appreciate that we are sinners unable to save ourselves, and we will give up trusting in ourselves that we are righteous.

Paul is so overwhelmed by the wonderful love, tender mercy, and amazing grace of God displayed in Christ's substitutionary sacrifice that he breaks out in worship. He takes a praise break in verse **5** and exalts God the Father. Referring to Him Paul says, *"to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*

Brothers and sisters, in a God-centered gospel, grace is central. And when grace is central God is exalted at every point.