



“Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:1–9).

The movie *Braveheart* tells the story of William Wallace, a common man who led Scotland to freedom from English rule. Wallace commanded a ragtag band of farmers and villagers to defeat their oppressors, forcing them back to England. The turning point for Scotland comes at the battle of Sterling. The Scots are vastly outnumbered and begin to flee before the battle even begins. Wallace rides onto the scene and reminds the Scots who they are and what is truly important.

I showed you this movie clip because I believe it very much depicts the heart of what the apostle Paul is doing in his letter to the Galatians. Galatians is a passionate letter written by a man who is trying to rouse God’s people to fight for freedom. Freedom from the tyranny of religion.

We Christians talk a lot about freedom in Christ. We preach about it, read books about it and sing about it. We all love God’s love and grace but I wonder how many of us think that his love depends on how we are doing in the Christian life? We are performance-based people at our core. Our whole lives are based on our performance—get good grades, go to a good school, make good money—it’s all based on how you do. The good that happens in our lives is because we’ve earned it, etc. As Christians we understand that we are saved by grace, but do we really know how to live by grace?

Deep down, if we were completely honest, I think many of us feel that God is disappointed with us because we haven’t performed well. Have you ever felt that way? I would call this

struggle-legalism. Like the Galatians, it’s hard for us to leave our legalism behind and to live as freed people because there is something very attractive about the law. “What will you do without freedom?” William Wallace asks his countrymen.

And so we come to the book of Galatians which will hopefully help us to fight for freedom once again

Paul was a church planting missionary. On his first missionary journey he started several churches in the region of Galatia (Acts 13-14). Galatia was a region in what is now modern day southern Turkey. He taught them that salvation was by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Period. He raised up elders and then moved on to other areas and churches. This letter was written probably only 15-20 years after the death of Christ. This was one of Paul’s earlier letters, probably his first written before the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15.

I. Paul DEFENDS his Calling (verses 1-2)

Paul begins his letter with an argument for his apostleship. An “apostle” was somebody who has been sent with the authority to represent somebody else. An Apostle was commissioned by Jesus Christ himself. They were the original 12 disciples. Obviously these false teachers in Galatia have been telling them that Paul was not the real deal! His authority to defend the gospel was not human, but divine. What Paul does next is that he clearly and accurately defines the gospel.

II. Paul DEFINES the Gospel (verses 3-5)

The Resurrection

Jesus was no ordinary man. Through his death and resurrection Jesus defeated **sin, satan, and death.**

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”

This was more than a salutation. Grace is the essence of the Gospel. Grace is the unmerited favor of God in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The gospel of grace is peace with God and with others as a result.

“Who gave himself”

Jesus died willingly. He freely gave his life away. *“For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). *“For the joy set before him, endured the cross, despising its shame”* (Hebrews 12:2). The reason he gave himself was *“for our sins.”* A major transaction took

place on the cross: my sin for his righteousness. The problem is that we owed God a huge debt for our sin that we could not pay, but the gospel is that Christ died in our place on the cross as our substitute and paid the debt for our sin. Thus the wrath of God was satisfied by the death of Jesus and so we can sing, "what can wash away my sins, nothing but the blood of Jesus." Here's a helpful illustration: What if you were on trial for murder, you know you did it, you were found guilty, sentenced to death, but then the judge takes off his robe, puts it on you, and dies in your place. That is exactly what happened on the cross.

"to deliver us from the present evil age"

The effect of the cross was that we have been delivered/rescued. Christ's death rescued us. We are not removed from this world, but rescued from the evil that dominates it. The evils of war, murder, oppression, slavery and the like are all consequences of a world saturated in sin. I can't change the world, but I can be free. In Christ we are free from the tyranny of this present evil age. That is why we pray "deliver us from evil."

"according to the will of our God and Father"

This was all part of God's plan from the beginning of time. In this statement of the Gospel not one thing is said about what **we** do. Not a single word. That's why we're calling this series "Freedom From Religion." Religion is all about what we do, but the Gospel is all about what God has done. Religion is spelled "do" while the Gospel is spelled "done." This was all God's work. "The Father does not love us because the Son died for us. Rather, the Son died for us because the Father loves us" (Ryken).

"to whom be glory forever"

Salvation is all God's work, therefore he gets all the glory. God gets the glory and we get his grace and peace. That sounds good to me! Now you might think, "Well, I know all about this. I understood and believed the Gospel as a small child." Or you may think, "That's basic Christianity. We all know that." Here is an often-overlooked point about this letter: It was written to professing Christians! The Galatians not only needed to understand the gospel again but they also needed to learn how it is lived out. "The gospel is not the ABC of the Christian life but the A-Z" (Tim Keller).

If someone asks you, "What is the Gospel?", can you give them an answer? A lot of Christians can't. We all need to have a working definition of the gospel, one that we can write in one sentence: We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

III. Paul DEALS with the Problem (verses 6-7)

After defining the gospel, Paul directly deals with the core of the problem. Have you ever written an angry email that you wish you could have taken back? In his letters, Paul usually has a few words of thanksgiving and encouragement, "I thank God for

you", etc. Not here. He goes straight for the jugular vein, "I am astonished," "I am amazed, shocked, taken aback, angry, and irritated." Paul is emotional!

Why is Paul so mad? What's the big deal? They had "so quickly" abandoned the gospel. "I was just there teaching you about Jesus and you received him! What happened?" They were "deserting the one who called them in the grace of Christ." They were deserting or abandoning the faith. These soldiers on the battlefield were defecting. They were not just deserting a doctrine, but the person of Jesus Christ, "the one who called them," the one who named them. They were "turning to a different gospel," which is no gospel at all. If the gospel is not bathed in grace, if it doesn't deal with sin, if it doesn't proclaim a risen Lord, then you have **religion** and not the gospel. Religion is people's beliefs and opinions about the existence and nature of God or gods, a particular institutionalized or personal system of beliefs and practices relating to the divine. That is not the gospel.

"there are some who trouble you"

Who were these people? Probably a group of very devout Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who probably meant well, knew most of the truth, but distorted it just a bit. They were insiders, but they were "troublemakers." These false teachers were just adding one thing to the gospel of grace—just get circumcised!

Here is what they were saying: "We believe in Paul and what he said, we believe that Jesus died for our sins and that he was raised from the dead. We've been baptized, we've been part of the church. In fact, we are Jews, God's elect. But, didn't Christ say that 'he came to fulfill the law not abolish it'? We've been keeping the Law of Moses for 1000 years and if you want the full gospel, the real gospel, you need to be circumcised in order to get it. Gentiles have always had to do this to be a part of God's people."

You have to understand these guys didn't walk around Galatia with T-shirts that said, "Hug me, I'm a false teacher." What made them so compelling and dangerous is that they embraced Jesus and knew how to talk the Christian talk. "The church's greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it, but those inside who try to change the gospel" (John Stott, *The Message of Galatians*).

Here's the problem that the whole of Galatians is teaching: Christ-plus-or-minus anything else as a requirement for full acceptance by God is not the gospel and therefore should be rejected. The Galatians were basically slipping into legalism.

What is legalism? Any attempt to make righteousness humanly manageable. Legalism cannot deal with the issues of the heart; we can't manage our hearts. Only Jesus can change our hearts. It's one thing to give 10% to the church, it's another to deal with greed in your heart. It's one thing to not look at pornography on the internet and feel pretty good about that, it's another to deal

with lust in our own hearts. I've struggled with legalism over the years in my quiet times, thought life, etc. I feel good when I am doing good. I feel terrible when I am not living up to the standards of religion that I've placed in my life. Can anyone relate? For Paul his righteous anger is not unfounded; the very foundation of the gospel is at stake.

Are we saved by grace or is there still something we have to do to be fully accepted by God?

Are we passionate about the gospel? In the movie *Braveheart*, William Wallace was passionate to say the least. He was a true leader. But he also wanted the people to be passionate about their freedom. They were called Scotsmen, too! Paul's passion for the gospel drips off these verses. Galatians teaches us that the gospel is not only how we come to Christ and are saved, but how we are to live the Christian life. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the gospel, preach it to ourselves, and pray that God will give us a passion about Jesus so that we do not slip back into the various ways we try to manage our righteousness.

IV. Paul DENOUNCES the False Teachers (verses 8-9)

Finally, because the foundation is at stake, the false teachers are denounced by Paul, "But even if **we** or an **angel** should preach." If anyone, no matter who they are or where their authority comes from, even if it is me, preaches a different gospel, let him be accursed!

The Greek word for accursed is *anathema*. These folks are under the wrath and curse of God. The NIV says, "let them be eternally cursed." In other words, they deserve to go to hell!

Paul is so serious about this that he repeats himself. This is a direct rebuke, from an apostle, that is to be treated as the words of Jesus. Anyone who distorts the one true gospel of Jesus Christ is to be eternally cursed. Like William Wallace, Paul was ready to take anyone on to preserve the freedom they have in Christ.

Are we prepared the fight for the gospel? We can only fight for the gospel when we know it and are living for it

CONCLUSION

Have you slipped back into a religious, legalistic, and performance-based Christianity? Do you believe that God loves you

but secretly wonder that his love depends on how you are doing in the Christian life? Deep down do you think that God is disappointed with you?

Tim Keller wrote:

Religion: I obey—therefore I'm accepted.

The Gospel: I'm accepted—therefore I obey.

Religion: Motivation is based on fear and insecurity.

The Gospel: Motivation is based on grateful joy.

Religion: I obey God in order to get things from God.

The Gospel: I obey God to get to God—to delight and resemble Him.

Religion: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or myself, since I believe, like Job's friends, that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life.

The Gospel: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

Religion: My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure.

The Gospel: My self-view is not based on a view of myself as a moral achiever. In Christ I am simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swagging nor sniveling.

"It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1).

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