

*From Paul, an apostle - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father,
who raised him from the dead - and from all the brothers who are with me,
To all 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 rescue us from this present evil age,
according to the will of God our Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you in the grace of Christ
and are turning to another 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 you received, let him be accursed!*

As we have said to you before, so now I say again:

If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed!

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?

If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was preached by me is not of human origin.

For I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Galatians 1:1-12

By Grace, Through Faith, In Christ Alone"

Properties Chair, Carl Mende

Leon Morris calls the letter to the Galatians "Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom" and writes that, "Galatians is a passionate letter, the outpouring of the soul of a preacher on fire for his Lord and deeply committed to bringing his hearers to an understanding of what saving grace is." Martin Luther so loved this letter that he called it his "Catherine Von Bora" after his wife because he said that, "I am married to it."

The letter to the Galatians was written at a time when the first century church had started to drift towards its first doctrinal crisis. What we are going to see is that it was a battle for the gospel. The Apostle Paul's authority and message were being attacked. False teachers, referred to by many commentators as "Judaizers," had gone into the churches after Paul had left telling the Galatians that gentile Christians had to become Jews and keep the law of Moses if they wanted to be "real" Christians.

The letter begins with "*Paul, an Apostle - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father*". So what we see is that Paul begins at the very first defending his authority. He is establishing that he was an Apostle and that his authority did not derive from any group or person. His divine commission did not come from any human source, such as the church or any human individual such as one of the other Apostles. Instead his authority and position came directly from Jesus and God the Father. He wanted there to be no doubt about his credentials.

Paul goes on to say that it came "*through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...*" Paul wanted to remind the Galatians that his gospel was about the risen Christ and that it was centered on Him. At the heart of Christianity is the atonement that Jesus accomplished in His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

The letter is written "*To the churches of Galatia:*" There is some disagreement among scholars as to what is exactly meant by the term "Galatia". Historically many scholars thought that the term referred to what was known as "Ethnic Galatia" which was in the North and would be what we call **northern** Turkey today. However, most modern scholars believe that it refers to the southern area of the Roman province of Galatia and that the letter was written to the Gentile churches that the Apostle Paul established in that region during his first missionary journey in Acts 13 and before the Jerusalem council of Acts 15.

Paul continues saying "*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,*" This will be a customary greeting for Paul and it is easy to read over this as a simple greeting, but for Paul these two words have deep meaning. Paul connects his statement of grace and peace directly with Jesus and God the Father. Grace has the sense of undeserved generosity or unmerited pardon. Grace is the New Testament concept at the heart of God's plan. The concept of peace for Paul was the peace that flows through the life of those who trust Jesus for salvation.

Martin Luther wrote of these two words that, "These two words, grace and peace, do contain in them the whole sum of Christianity. Grace containeth the remission of sins, peace a quiet and joyful conscience." Paul goes on to write that it was Jesus "*who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age,*" Paul is here again emphasizing the central truth of the gospel. He is showing that the gospel is concerned with Christ's sacrifice of Himself and not with our conformity to the law.

The purpose of His sacrifice was to “*deliver us from the present evil age.*” The Jews and therefore the Christians had an idea of two ages, the “present age” and the “age to come”. What Christ’s sacrifice has done is to transfer the Christian from one age to the other, from the sphere of Satan’s power to that of God. Paul then proceeds to issue a very sharp rebuke of the Galatians, stating “*I am astonished...*” we might say in today’s language, “I’m shocked”, “...*that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.*” The verb here is in the present tense, meaning that this was still taking place; they were still in the process of turning away. I think that this is why we see so much emotion in what Paul was writing.

They were turning away from God who had called them and turning to what Paul calls a “*different gospel.*” Paul had preached to them that salvation was by grace in Christ alone, but these false teachers were trying to turn them to a “gospel” of works, a “gospel” of keeping the Old Testament law. Paul goes on to say “*not that there is another gospel.*” I like how the NIV translates this, “*which really is no gospel at all.*” The point being that this “*different gospel*” was a false gospel.

He continues saying, “*there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*” This other gospel was a distortion of the true gospel. Paul feels so strongly about this that he pronounces a curse on those who would bring this false gospel. He says, “*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.*”

Martin Luther wrote of this: “The Church, Peter, the apostles, angels from heaven, are not to be heard unless they teach the genuine Word of God.” This point is so important that Paul repeats it saying, “*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.*” The word translated “accursed” is the Greek word “anathema” and Grant Osborne in his commentary says that it has the sense of “being cut off from the community and condemned and destroyed at the judgment seat of God.” Nothing could be more serious.

Paul is calling down eternal judgment on anyone who would distort the true gospel of Christ. So what is that gospel that Paul was preaching? In 1 Corinthians 15, he says to the Corinthian church, “*Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel I preached to you.... For I passed on to you as most important what I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,*” This is the gospel Paul preached.

Finally Paul goes on to say, “*For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*” Paul wanted to make the point that the gospel he preached did not have a human origin. F.F Bruce says of this that “the gospel preached by Paul is not the true gospel because it is Paul who preaches it, it is the true gospel because the risen Christ gave it to Paul to preach.”

In Acts 13 when Paul and Barnabas were preaching in the synagogue in Antioch, Paul said, “*Therefore, let it be known to you, brothers and sisters, that through this man forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you. Everyone who believes is justified through him from everything that you could not be justified from through the law of Moses.*” So what we see here and what we will continue to see as we work our way through the letter to the Galatians is that salvation is not grace plus circumcision, or grace plus eating kosher, or grace plus keeping the Sabbath or Jewish Holy Days or grace plus the sacrifices or grace plus anything else.

Salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone. So where does that leave us? The question for you and for me is this --- do we believe that and have we accepted Him as our Lord and Savior.