

Galatians 1:1-5 -“The Grace and Peace of God”

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

This letter to the Galatian church is an exhortation from Paul to consider the seriousness of tampering with the gospel in such a way as to give people the wrong information concerning the will of God as it relates to how one comes into a personal relationship with our Creator.

As I mentioned in my introduction to this letter last week it was the Judaizers who felt compelled to assist the Gentile believers in pursuing a path which included the law as an addition to their salvation experience.

They reasoned that since salvation was of the Jews, and that Jesus was a Jewish Messiah who came to Israel for their redemption, it necessarily followed that Christianity is an extension of Judaism which had as one of its hallmarks, the law.

In an odd sort of way many of these Judaizers saw Christianity as a type of a hybrid where these two systems of grace and law, O.T. traditions and regulations, were to be combined with the atonement of Christ on the cross, thus making it a uniquely Jewish faith in the Messiah.

And so, when Paul writes this letter he has to confront this false teaching and tell these people in no uncertain terms that to put such requirements on the Gentiles, such as mandatory circumcision, is nothing short of slapping God in the face who made no such requirements on Jews or Gentiles when it came to salvation.

But at the outset of this letter Paul is having to deal with another problem in Galatia. And this problem has to do with their apparent unwillingness to receive such a rebuke from this former Pharisee. Why?

Quite simply, it was common knowledge that Jesus Christ had commissioned 12 apostles, all of whom were his original 12 chosen disciples who followed Him during His earthly ministry.

It was also common knowledge that Judas had betrayed Christ and thus proved himself not to be a true follower of Christ. His replacement was Matthias and thus the number 12 was reestablished as those who were chosen by the Lord to be His special representatives known as apostles, all Jews.

Now, along comes Paul, who was a persecutor of the church, and he claims to be an apostle. An apostle, I might add, who taught that all people were welcome into the Kingdom of Christ through faith, without having to jump through all the hoops of the Mosaic law, to be counted righteous.

A lot of Jewish believers had a problem with this. In fact, this was such a point of contention that even Peter, an apostle, was intimidated by the Jewish faction when it came to being identified with Gentile believers. Paul brings this up in this very letter.

GAL 2:11-14 “When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

Peter and the rest of the Jewish believers in Antioch knew that there was freedom from the law and they knew that they had liberty to pursue a lifestyle which included the freedom to eat whatever they wanted, and to fellowship with any and all believers, including Gentiles.

But because most of the early believers were Jews, some of whom were already leaders in the Synagogues before coming to faith in Christ, it was very intimidating to step out in faith and feel free to depart from the old ways as they embraced the New Covenant in Christ by faith.

The same Paul who did not back down to these Jewish believers who came from Jerusalem, is the same Paul who is having to deal with similar Judaizers in Galatia. These Judaizers most certainly used the tactic of questioning Paul's apostleship as one way to bring doubt to his law-free gospel.

I'm sure it galled them to think that a former Pharisee would so quickly leave the old ways when they felt the old ways were so important in making sure that these new Gentile believers stayed on the true path of holiness before the God of Israel, the King of the Jews.

Paul knew that there were those who questioned his apostleship. Now this doesn't mean they necessarily questioned his evangelistic ministry. They knew that even the other apostles validated the evangelistic ministry of Paul. And yet, despite how the other apostles also recognized Paul's apostolic ministry as coming from God, these Judaizers simply ignored this so as to have leverage in discrediting Paul.

This sort of wickedness would not go unnoticed by God. Paul, after all, was God's choice. To question Paul's apostleship was to question God Himself. And this is the point Paul makes in these opening verses.

GAL 1:1 "Paul, an apostle -sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead..."

In most of Paul's letters he begins in a similar way of identifying himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ.

ROM 1:1 "Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God..."

1CO 1:1 "Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God..."

COL 1:1 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God..."

It was important that the church know that Paul was not just some self-appointed apostle, as many Judaizers certainly accused him of being, but that it was by the will of God that he was who he was.

I mean, Paul was not looking to be an apostle when the risen Lord Jesus approached him on the road to Damascus. And this is what makes Paul so grateful and thankful; that the Lord would extend grace to a persecutor of the church and then turn around and use Paul in such a magnificent way. This humbled Paul.

But being humbled didn't mean he was going to let these Judaizers dictate to him what his role in the kingdom of God would be. He still had to be true to his call as one who was a special ambassador, one who was sent by Jesus Christ Himself to establish the church on the foundation of Christ, which was a primary function of the 12 apostles and those apostles called after the 12.

Paul never questioned the validity of the original 12 apostles, but he still included himself in the company of these 12. When writing to the Corinthians about the resurrection of Jesus Christ he makes it clear that he too saw the risen Christ, which was a requirement of being an apostle.

1CO 15:7-10 "Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them -yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

And this is exactly what Paul is saying here in our text. He's "an apostle -sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead..."

There was not some committee who voted Paul into his apostolic role, which by the way, many Judaizers probably felt was the proper way of becoming an apostle. They would have preferred all of the apostles in Jerusalem to have convened and appointed Paul, but this is not what happened.

In fact, on several occasions, Paul makes it clear that no man, or group of men, determined that he would be an apostle of Jesus Christ. Was this unusual? Yes, in a way it was. But if you think about it, no mere man appointed the original 12 either.

It was Jesus Christ who appointed the 12. And then, even in replacing Judas the apostles didn't vote Matthias in. They drew lots and let the decision be made by God above.

ACT 1:23-26 "So they proposed two men: Joseph called Barsabbas (also known as Justus) and Matthias. Then they prayed, "Lord, you know everyone's heart. Show us which of these two you have chosen to take over this apostolic ministry, which Judas left to go where he belongs." Then they cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the eleven apostles."

Now, someone might say, well Paul was sent out by the church at Antioch and so he most certainly was sent by men. The fact of the matter is that though Paul was prayed for by the church at Antioch and sent out with their blessing this doesn't mean that Paul was not first chosen personally by Christ, without the agency of men.

ACT 13:1-4 "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. The two of them, sent on their way by the Holy Spirit, went down to Seleucia and sailed from there to Cyprus."

None of this negates the fact that Jesus Christ uses the agency of His church to validate the ministry of His leaders. But even in the normal way of ordaining Pastors, elders and deacons through the laying on of hands by the leadership, it's still Jesus Christ who calls them to such ministry.

If it were simply the choice of men in the church determining who is fit for ministry you could conceivably end up with only hired hands instead of men moved by the Holy Spirit to pursue a ministry which the Lord wants you to have.

The office of apostle was unique to the first century church. And God's choice of Paul was unique in the sense that the other apostles didn't put it to a vote or even bring Paul before the Lord and cast lots between him and someone else.

God's choice for Paul to be an apostle was made evident after his conversion on the road to Damascus as Ananias, who was sent to Paul by the Lord, asked how this could be since Paul was a persecutor of the church.

ACT 9:15 "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel."

Now, was Ananias going to Damascus to give Paul the gospel? No. Paul had already heard the gospel. He had already been confronted with the truth of the risen Christ and His salvation. How did Paul hear about this? Did some other evangelist share the

gospel with him between the time he was struck down on the road and when he arrived in Damascus?

No. No man ever shared the gospel with Paul so as to bring him to a saving faith in Christ. No group of men huddled around this former Pharisee to show him the way. It was Jesus Christ Himself who gave Paul the gospel. It was Christ Himself who told Paul what He wanted Paul to do. Paul recounts this when giving his testimony to King Agrippa.

ACT 26:13 -18 “About noon, O king, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’”

So, Paul is true to his word here in our text. He was not sent from men, nor by any man in this world. He was called and sent by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself; but not just Jesus Christ. Paul tells us he was also sent by God the Father who raised Him from the dead.

Now, what is the significance of this? Paul is making it clear that he knows that ultimately it was the plan of the Father to send the Son into the world to redeem a people for Himself. But by connecting the Son and the Father in the same sentence and with the same intent of sending Paul to be His apostle, he is placing both Jesus and the Father on the same level as being God.

Both of them are of one mind as to their purpose, and one nature as to accomplishing only what God could accomplish in becoming a sinless man and dying for the sins of His people as a perfect sacrifice.

Paul is declaring that I have all the back-up I need in assuring you Galatians that no matter what man may question my apostleship and authority in Christ, God the Father Himself is the One who commissioned me, along with His risen Son who appeared to me

personally. And if you want to continue to question my apostolic authority you'll have to take it up with God.

The reason this is so important for Paul to establish at the beginning of this letter is to set the stage for everything else Paul has to say in this letter. Because what Paul says here is not his own opinion, but the very word of God.

And so, when it comes to confronting their wrong thinking on the gospel by the addition of the law, it is not Paul who is condemning it, it is God. Paul has no power to condemn anyone. But God does and they had better think twice about taking Christ's gospel, which was given directly by the risen Jesus to Paul, and consider what they're doing by coming against Jesus Christ.

The same God and Father who sent His only begotten Son into the world He loved so much, is the same Father who then raised Jesus from the dead. This is another way of clarifying to a Jew that this is the same Creator and Father God who brought Israel out of Egypt with a mighty hand, and who raised His Son with that same mighty hand.

Paul has now set the tone of this letter. And as God's mouthpiece the Galatians owe it to the Lord to submit to His word and His will as delivered by Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

GAL 1:2 "and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia:..."

This verse is inserted to show Paul's affection for the Galatians as well as the affection of all those with Paul. It also shows how these other brothers with Paul, that would have included many names these Galatians would recognize as being godly servants, were people who stood with Paul as an apostle. They would give credence to his ministry as one sent from God in a special way.

But before launching into his disbelief that they are tampering with the gospel of Jesus Christ, Paul first reminds these Galatian Christians that not only is he on their side, but more important so is God. But he makes it clear that God is concerned that they adhere to the truth.

GAL 1:3-4 "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father..."

This is not just a nicety that Paul includes in the beginning of this letter as though it were simply letter writing protocol. Paul is actually showing these Galatians that despite how they might be messing up in this area of the gospel, God still extends grace. He still extends mercy and strength to move forward in the will of God in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Remember, as an apostle, Paul is speaking on behalf of Jesus Christ and the Father who raised Him from the dead. Paul is saying, “here’s what the Lord wants me to remind you of. He sends His grace and peace to you and wants to prompt your hearts so as to bring to mind how that grace and peace was established through His Son Jesus Christ alone.

Grace and peace from God go hand in hand. There is no peace with God outside of His grace, His unmerited favor being extended to us so that we might know what it means to have life in Christ.

We often think of grace and peace as generic terms for joy and happiness. But in theological terms grace and peace are essential elements for bringing us out from under the wrath of God into a relationship free from condemnation.

Grace from God is a choice on His behalf whereby He extends the means by which we can have this relationship despite the fact that nothing has changed on our part. In other words, He doesn’t extend grace and love because we’ve done something to draw near to Him, or that we’ve somehow had a change of heart and so He feels compelled to give us life.

No, nothing has changed on our part. We’re still as guilty and self-seeking as we’ve ever been, and yet He approaches us, who at best have a righteousness which can be compared to filthy rags, and still decides to allow us to be with Him forever.

ROM 5:8-10 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!”

This is grace. This is love undeserved. It is a reconciliation which was given to us as a gift. And this is one of the reasons Paul is so

dumb-founded that they would take this grace and try to add anything to it.

But grace from God always accomplishes His will, which in this case is peace. True grace acts, it is not without purpose. And the purpose these Galatians need to understand is that this grace from God is meant to change their legal status or position with God.

Legally we all stand condemned because of our sin. The wages of sin is death. That's a legal problem which has to be dealt with legally and judiciously. If this legal problem is not dealt with then the only alternative is for us to pay the debt which results in God's righteous wrath upon us.

By nature we are at war with God. We are His enemies because of our sin. This is what Paul meant when he said in Romans, "For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!" (ROM 5:10)

The word enemy in this verse is the Greek word echthros, and it's from the primary echtho, (to hate). It's also used to mean hostile, and opposing another. This is the status of all men outside of Christ. By nature we are hostile toward God, but He is judiciously hostile toward us as well, to the extent that unless our judicial status is changed we will only experience His just wrath.

And yet, He has loved us so much, despite the fact that we have continued to go our own way, and do our own thing as we rebel against our Lord and God, that He sent His Son into this world to die for us. Of course, we recognize this as coming from John 3:16. But we usually stop short of the rest of the text which explains what happens to those who will not believe.

JOH 3:16,18,36 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him."

It's not as though God delights in condemning people to being separated from Him forever, but He must be just and faithful to His word.

2PE 3:9-10 “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

He must punish sin. So, how is our judicial problem of having to pay our debt for sin going to be changed legally, since God is just? He takes on flesh and pays our debt for us as our perfect sacrifice. He satisfies His own justice by meeting its demands and then extending that grace to us in the form of peace.

Where once we stood condemned and were at war with God, our entire status has been changed legally by God to a relationship of peace with Him as we place our faith in His atoning sacrifice on the cross. And once that relationship has been changed from wrath to peace it can never be changed back.

JOH 10:28-29 “I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand.”

ROM 8:1-4 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

It's true, just as Paul writes in verses 3 and 4 of our text, “the Lord Jesus Christ, gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.

This is the theme of Galatians. And as Paul ponders this wondrous salvation of deliverance from sin and this present evil age, he breaks forth in praise.

GAL 1:5 “... to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

We give glory to God by the way we live out this free gift of eternal life, but as Paul will show these Galatians, we also give glory to God by attributing salvation entirely to the grace of God

found in Christ Jesus. To add anything, or any human effort to attain our salvation is to take glory away from God.

May our lives give Him glory as we are thankful and grateful people who understand the depths of our sin problem and rejoice in the heights of grace and peace we now enjoy in Christ forever and ever, who has brought us from the darkness of sin and God's wrath into His glorious light and peace.