

Stay the Course – Stick with the True Gospel

Introduction

Galatians 1:1-5 - “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), ² and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The early church made an enormous impact on the world for the glory of God. Souls were powerfully saved and disciples were made who multiplied the powerful influence of God throughout the world. But somewhere along the line the church took a wrong turn. We see evidence of this wrong turn even in the early church. Paul wrote to the Galatians to warn them that they were getting off course. Galatians is a letter with vital course corrections. The way of the Lord can be winding at times. But God is always there to keep us on track. It's only if we take a wrong turn and get off of God's course that we are in danger of jumping the track and wrecking.

When we look at the church today and the state of Christianity in general, we can too often liken it to a train wreck. We have taken a wrong turn. We are off course and hurtling out of control. The passengers on the train are suffering from motion sickness due to the constant directional changes and unsteadiness of the route we are taking. And we are not making the stops God has mapped out for us to rescue the lost, the sick, those dying in their sins. We've lost our direction and purpose. We're on a track that leads to a cliff and a fatal fall. The time is short and the end is near. Only a course correction from God can save us. That saving course correction is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians. The message of Galatians is *Stay the Course – Stick with the True Gospel*.

Paul is the author of this epistle (1:1-2). He is writing to a group of churches in the region of Galatia which is located in modern day Asia Minor (1:2). This is the only epistle where Paul addresses a group of churches in a region rather than a particular church. Paul visited Galatia on his first missionary journey when he visited the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe located in the south of Galatia (Acts 13:51; 14:8, 20). On his second missionary journey Paul was forbidden to go to Galatia (Acts 16:6). He again visited this area during his third missionary journey (Acts 18:23).

The people of Galatia were originally Celtic people who had migrated from the regions of Gaul to the northwest. They settled south of the Black Sea where present day Armenia resides. The seriousness of the message contained in this letter is shown by the absence of any reference to an individual. There are no preliminary offers of thanks by Paul for the people of these churches. It is as though Paul wanted to get right down to business. He dispensed with the pleasantries and got right to it. (And he does by expressing his amazement right from the start that some are leaving the true gospel for a false gospel that is really no gospel at all - 1:6-9). This letter is one of Paul's most passionate. There was a lot at stake and Paul wanted to clearly and completely

identify the risks of leaving the gospel with God and His grace at the center for a religious system of self-effort and works righteousness.

Galatians is one of Paul's shorter epistles (i.e. letters) but it has been powerfully used by God. It is referred to as a *mini Romans* because like Paul's epistle to the Romans it emphasizes the doctrine of salvation/justification by grace through faith (1:3-4). The epistle to the Galatians is similar to 2 Corinthians in that Paul defends his apostolic calling and authority. He was accused of having received his apostolic authority *from men* but he is quick to establish in his opening words that his apostleship is "not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead" (1:1).

From the opening verses of this epistle we have a clear explanation of the gospel taught by Paul (e.g. 1:3-4). Paul's main opponents in the region of Galatia were Judaizing legalists who contended that salvation involved Jesus and the cross but had to be supplemented with keeping the law and ritual ceremonies like circumcision. Paul counters this by clearly explaining the gospel of God's grace and the liberty the believer has against any form of legalism.

In the early stages of the church there was an initial tension between believers from a Jewish and non-Jewish backgrounds. Apostolic letters like Galatians helped to clarify the distinctions between God's use of the Law and life in the Spirit. But this epistle was not limited to the first century in its influence. Centuries later God used this letter to address the corruption that had crept into the church. Galatians is referred to as, "the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation." The message of the epistle that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone was one of the major themes preached by the Reformers. Martin Luther loved this epistle so much that he often referred to it as his wife, (i.e. "my Katie von Bora"). Luther's commentary on the letter to the Galatians was circulated and widely read by the people of his day and was greatly used by God to help people enslaved in religion shake off the shackles of unscriptural ritual and religion. Galatians is often also called the, "Magna Charta of Christian Liberty," because of its inspired message that there is salvation from the penalty and power of sin and that such liberty comes not by human efforts or good works but by God's grace through faith in God's empowerment.¹

It's believed that this letter was written between 49-52 A.D.² The region of Galatia was first inhabited by Phrygians who were nature worshipers which explains why some of those who Paul was writing to may have been involved with "sorcery" (5:20). This region was also heavily populated by a strong Jewish community which may explain their susceptibility to Judaizers promoting a works righteousness based on keeping the Law. One commentator states, "The Galatians were noted for their impetuosity, fickleness, and love for new and curious things."³ This may explain why Paul had to exhort some of his readers in Galatia to not vacillate in their beliefs (2:18; 3:1-5).

¹Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary : An exposition of the scriptures* (2:587). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

² C.I. Scofield, Ed., *The Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 2002. Page1609

³Ibid. C.I. Scofield, Ed., *The Scofield Study Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc. 2002. Page1609

Paul wrote to the Galatians in order to address a two headed monster of a problem. The churches of Galatia were being challenged in the area of purity of doctrine as well as purity of life. This is reflected in the contrasts found in this epistle such as:

- 1:1-2 – Paul an apostle by God not by men.
 - 1:10-17 – Seeking God’s favor v. Seeking favor of men.
 - 1:18-24 – Seeing apostles v. Not seeing apostles.
 - 2:11-21 – Peter impartial v. Peter prejudiced (v. 1-15).
- 1:6-9 – Gospel of grace v. Perverted gospel.
 - 2:1-10 – Requiring circumcision v. Not requiring circumcision.
 - 2:16 - Justified by Law v. Justified by faith.
 - 2:18 - Old v. New
 - 3:10-14 – Law v. Faith.
- 3:15-18 – Heirs by Law v. Heirs by faith.
 - 4:1-11 – Heir v. Slave.
 - 4:21-31 – Born of slave woman v. Born of free woman.
- 5:2-12 – Law/Circumcision v. Christ/Love
 - 5:16-25 – Spirit v. Flesh.
 - 6:7-10 – Sow to Spirit v. Sow to flesh.
 - 6:11-16 – Circumcision oriented v. New creation oriented.

This is also reflected in a number of recurrent themes in this epistle such as:

- “Gospel” – 1:6-9,11; 2:2,5,7,14; 3:8; 4:13.
- “Faith” – 1:23; 2:16,20; 3:2,5,7,8,9,11,12,14,22,23-26;5:5,6; 6:10
- “Justification” – 2:16,17,21; 3:8,11,24; 5:4
- “Freedom” - 2:4; 3:28; 4:22,23,26,30,31; 5:1,13
- “Circumcision/Law” – 2:3,7,8,9,12,16,19,21; 3:2,5,10-13,17,18,19,21,23,24; 4:4,5,21; 5:2,3,4,6,11,14,18,23; 6:2,12,13,15.
- “Flesh/Man” – 1:1,10,11,12,16; 2:20 (“I”); 3:3; 4:23,29; 5:13,16,17,19-21, 24; 6:8,12,13
- “Spirit” – 3:3,5; 4:3,9,29; 5:5,16,17,18,22-23; 6:1,8,18.
- “Grace” – 1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18.

The epistle to the Galatians can be outlined in the following way:

1. 1:1-5 – Introduction
2. 1:6 – 2:21 – The Only True Gospel is Worth Defending
 - a. 1:6-10 – The only True Gospel
 - b. 1:11-17 – The Gospel is from God
 - c. 1:18-24 – God Glorified by the Power of the Gospel evidenced in the life of Paul
 - d. 2:1-10 – The Gospel Preached by Paul Confirmed
 - e. 2:11-21 – The Gospel is Worth Fighting For
3. 3:1 – 4:31 – The Foolishness of Leaving the Gospel of Promise
 - a. 3:1-9 – O Foolish Fickle Galatians!
 - b. 3:10-14 – Redeemed from the Curse
 - c. 3:15-18 – The Unannulable Promise

- d. 3:19-25 – The Law Our Tutor
- e. 3:26-29 – One in Christ
- f. 4:1-7 – Not a Slave but a Son
- g. 4:8-20 – Don't Turn Back!
- h. 4:21-31 – Two Covenants
- 4. 5:1 – 6:18 – Liberating Life in the Spirit
 - a. 5:1-6 – Stay Free
 - b. 5:7-15 – Liberated to Love
 - c. 5:16-26 – Walk in the Spirit
 - d. 6:1-5 – Bear One Another's Burdens
 - e. 6:6-10 – You Reap what You Sow
 - f. 6:11-15 – Crucified to the World
 - g. 6:16-18 – Marks of the LORD

What is the true Gospel?

Galatians 1:1, 3-5 - ³ “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), . . . Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

In these few opening verses, right from the start, Paul lays out the true gospel. The first point Paul makes is that His apostleship and therefore the gospel he preaches is from God not men (1:1a). The gospel is not based on human opinion but on revelation from God.

The next thing Paul mentions is the resurrection of Jesus. He mentions “Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead.” The resurrection is indispensable to the gospel. Without the resurrection there is no gospel (1 Corinthians 15). The resurrection is God’s supernatural imprimatur to validate that the work of Jesus on the cross was acceptable to Him and fulfilled His holy plans for our salvation from sin and sin’s ultimate consequence, death (1:1b).

Paul then is inspired to continue with the word “grace” (1:3a). *Grace* is God’s unmerited undeserved favor on our behalf. Salvation is by grace and the true gospel is based on God’s grace. Grace is a topic mentioned often by Paul in this epistle (1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4; 6:18). Grace is what God does for us even though we do not deserve it. Grace is what God does for us simply because He is gracious. Paul always started his letters off with the mention of God’s grace to his recipients.

After mentioning God’s grace Paul spoke of God’s peace (1:3b). This peace is peace with God. Before we experience the salvation that comes through God’s grace we are in reality at war with God. But when we receive Jesus as Savior by God’s grace through faith in Him, we enter into peace with God (Romans 5:1). The war ends and we are allied with God. But you cannot experience peace with God until you accept and receive the gospel offered to you by God’s grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

It should be mentioned that there is a difference between experiencing peace *with* God and experiencing the peace *of* God. It is possible for someone to be at peace with God but still have anxiety and stress related issues. That is because of the difference between having peace with God and the peace of God. The peace of God is something the believer receives by faith when they prayerfully bring all of their anxiety producing life issues to Him (Philippians 4:6-7). The “peace of God” comes when by faith and the power of God (Philippians 2:13) we alter the way we think and let Jesus be Lord of our mind and thoughts (Philippians 4:8-9). This is something God has promised to work in us (Philippians 1:6). It may take time and some people may experience it to a greater extent than others, but the peace of God is promised and available to us from God.

And that is the important thing to remember, the *grace* and *peace* mentioned by Paul in his opening words of Galatians and elsewhere are “from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3c). Such things are not a product of looking within ourselves. They are the work of God in our lives and hearts. Grace is all about God working in us. Peace is all about God working in us. The focus of the true gospel is on God. The focus of a false gospel is on people. That is the bottom line foundational issue and difference between the true and false gospel.

In verse 4 Paul lays out in a compact segment the true gospel in a nutshell. Jesus “gave Himself for our sins,” (1:4a). God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21). Jesus paid, “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23a) so that we might be able to receive salvation as a free and gracious gift of God through faith in Him (Romans 6:23b). Jesus fulfilled the prophetic substitutionary sacrifice of the Messiah on the cross (Isaiah 53). Jesus was the only One qualified or able to accomplish this because He was the only Man who ever lived a perfect sinless life (1 Peter 1:18-19).

The power of the gospel is referred to in the phrase, “that He might deliver us from this present evil age” (1:4b). The true gospel is powerful enough to break the strangle hold of sin in people’s lives (Romans 1:16). We are not *free to* sin but *freed from* having to sin. Now we likely will sin and if we do we have an Advocate in Jesus who has made a way for us to be forgiven and cleansed from our sins once we have been saved (1 John 1:7, 9; 2:1-2). And while we live in this fallen world we are not of this world, but live holy lives in Him looking for His return (John 16:33; 17:13-19; 1 John 3:1-3).

The true gospel is “according to the will of the Father” (1:4c). Salvation is not according to the will of people or their opinions (John 1:12-13). Salvation is not based on human guess work or subjective theory, it is based on the will of God as revealed in His word by the Holy Spirit (e.g. 1 Thessalonians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17). The true Gospel is “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2) not *my will be done to get me to heaven*. There are no alternative routes to heaven outside of Jesus and the cross (Matthew 26:36-46; John 14:6; Acts 4:12). That is why Paul is so passionate in defending the true gospel. There is no other “gospel” than the one revealed by God. No one has any right to alter or add on to the true gospel of God. The message of Galatians is that when anything is added to the true gospel, (such as human works or opinion), the gospel changes from true to false. Stay the course, stick with the true gospel.

The words of verse 5 tell us what the appropriate response to the true gospel should be. Paul says, “to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.” (1:5). The true gospel of God is so great that God deserves to be glorified for ever and ever. This tips us off to the severity of the Galatians sin. They have failed to glorify God or appreciate the true gospel of God. This is proved by their consideration of *another* gospel. They held God’s gospel of grace in such little esteem and value that they were casually and easily forsaking it for a dark alternative. Paul often gloried in the magnificence of the glorious gospel of God (2 Corinthians 3:8-11; 4:4-6; Ephesians 1:6, 12; 2:7; 3:8-12). That is why he is moved to “marvel” at how soon they are throwing away the precious jewel of the true gospel.

As long as there are temptations, an enemy seeking to keep people from the LORD, from knowing Him and His many blessings, there will be the danger of getting off of the straight and narrow way Jesus spoke about (Matthew 7:13-14). The way of the LORD is the only safe way that leads to eternal life with Him. Getting off God’s path in any way opens one to a host of dangers that can shipwreck your faith. The message of God in the epistle to the Galatians is one we need to take to heart today. The message is *Stay the Course – Stick with the True Gospel*. This epistle will show us why this is the best advice and how to go about doing it. Galatians will show us how to guard against second guessing God’s word.