

Galatians 1:1-5: This is the Gospel

Exegetical Big Idea: Paul wants the Galatian churches to understand that through the sacrifice and resurrection of Christ, they are delivered from evil to peace with God by grace alone, to the glory of God.

Homiletical Big Idea: **The True Gospel comes from God, is about God, and glorifies God.**

Fallen Condition Focus: As the entire letter to the Galatians shows, false gospels exist that lead only to slavery, as opposed to the true Gospel that leads to genuine freedom in Christ.

Background:

There is really no doubt as to who wrote the letter to the Galatians. The apostle Paul claims this and nobody seriously doubts this. As with other epistles (letters), we don't have any dates attached to them. That's not unusual for letters at that time, but it does make it difficult for scholars to place when letters were written. As best as can be ascertained, the letter to the Galatians was written as early as about 48 A.D. (and this date is most likely), but it could have been written up to about a decade later.

It's important to understand too that the term "Galatia" was not a single city, but rather a large region of land. This letter then is not written to a single church, but was meant to be passed around to many established churches in the Galatian area. That's why we read in the opening verses that the letter is meant for the "churches (plural) of Galatia".

While it's not exactly known when the letter was written, and early date for the letter is important to understand because it gives us insight into what's going on culturally and politically at that time.

When we think of the early church, we often think of persecution by the Roman Empire. We see that in books like 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy and certainly we think of John on Patmos recording the vision that we have as the book of Revelation. He's on Patmos imprisoned for the Gospel.

But that's not what's happening here in Galatians. It wasn't really until A.D. 64 that persecution of the Christians by the Romans became a big concern. In July of A.D. 64 there were a series of fires in Rome that leveled much of the city. The emperor at the time, Nero, was blamed for these fires because he often spoke about wanting to destroy the city and rebuild it in his image. Whether or not he actually started the fires is debated, but what he did do for certain was blame the Christians. That's when the persecution of Christians started, first locally in Rome and then spreading out eventually.

The Romans didn't care too much about Christians at the time Galatians was written. In fact they just thought that Christianity was just a subgroup of Judaism, which they didn't mind.

They did not grasp the significant differences between Christianity and Judaism as we know them.

So if it's not the Romans who are troubling the Galatian church, what does Paul write about? Well it's exactly that difference between Judaism and Christianity that is at the heart of the letter to the Galatians. The churches in Galatia are primarily gentile churches. Which means they have become Christians, without all that Jewish background. The problem is that Jewish troublemakers have come to these churches, likely from outside of them, and are preaching to them that they need not only to

accept Jesus, but the whole of the Law of Moses as well! And we're not talking about obeying the law of God out of reverence and response to him, as we are called to do. They are being told that they can't be saved unless basically they become Jewish first.

Paul rightly labels this as false gospel teaching. And throughout the letter develops this theme that false gospels like the one being taught by these outsiders only leads to slavery to self-righteous sin and slavery to needed to obey the whole law, while the Gospel of Christ leads to true and eternal freedom.

All that being said, we're going to call this series "The Gospel of Freedom". We will learn from Paul what exactly the gospel is and what it means to really have freedom in Christ.

Intro:

There are a few subjects that really threaten to divide people. Politics is obviously one of them, but I'm not brave enough to start a show of hands on political matters. There's also the matter of which is better, Coca-Cola or Pepsi. A quick show of hands would reveal that some prefer one to the other. In fact I know there are some people who are so adamant that one is better over the other that they would only drink the one they prefer and never ever drink the other.

But I think we would be fascinated and surprised if we held a blind taste test. I wonder how many of us would actually be able to both taste a difference and be able to correctly guess which is which. I suspect that there would even be some who are adamant that they like one and not the other, but who also would not be able to pass that test.

Now I'm not a huge pop fan, and while I've done that test before, I'm not confident that I could do it again successfully.

Essentially that is what's happening to the Galatian churches here on a spiritual level. Can they taste the difference between to different messages, two different "gospels"? Of course only one is the true gospel, while the other will only lead to death. Can you taste the difference?

What Paul does in the very opening of the letter, is outline for them what the true gospel is, so that they can recognize what a false gospel is. Paul wants them to know that:

**The True Gospel comes from God, is about God, and glorifies God.**

### **Vv.1-2: Paul's Gospel is Christ's Gospel.**

Paul's letter starts off like a pretty normal ancient Roman letter, and not unlike others that he wrote. He begins by saying who he is, namely, "Paul and apostle". Now, usually he would go right into "...and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia" as we read in verse 2. But he breaks this up to add something important.

He defends his apostleship right off the bat in this letter by writing that he is an apostle "not by men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead". Why does Paul do this? Well one of the things that seems to be clearly happening in this letter is that Paul is addressing those trouble makers because they are claiming that Paul himself is *not* one of the twelve apostles.

And it's true.

But is that a problem? Absolutely not. Paul gets defensive here not because of his own pride. Paul gets defensive here for the sake of the good of the Galatians. Paul is just as much an apostle as the others. He's just as much an apostle as Peter. Paul has not been called to be an apostle by Peter. He's been called directly by Christ.

You'll remember that Jesus chose 12 young men who were to be with him in his ministry and Mark tell us that he chose them specifically to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. Judas of course was part of that group, but he betrayed Jesus. A man by the name of Mathias was chosen to replace Judas, but Paul was not among them. We're going to hear Paul give a bit of a biography of himself later in the chapter but when Jesus had been resurrected and ascended to heaven, Paul was persecuting the church!

Until, the resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul (also known as Saul) and Paul repented and became a believer. On top of that, Christ revealed to Paul that he was going to suffer for the name of Christ and be preacher of the good news of Christ to the gentile. This is what Paul is referring to.

To be clear he's not denying that his gospel is any different than Peter's gospel. He's not saying he is a rogue. He's not saying that he is competing against the other apostles. He's simply making the case that since he was called directly from God, his gospel then is directly from God.

[It's so easy to fake photos these days. Suppose for a minute there was a photo of me lifting a huge weight, and this photo was circulating. Some of course would see the photo and they'd believe it. But some might think to themselves "I know Jason is not that strong. I think that's a fake photo". And let's say you're the one who is showing this doubter the photo and they ask you "where did you get the photo?" Which answer is going to illicit more trust? If you answer "I got it from so and so and they got it from so and so", or "I took the photo myself". Of course it is more convincing if you took the photo yourself, if you are a reputable source.]

Paul is saying "listen, I'm a reputable source, Christ appeared to me and called me into this ministry and gave me this message to preach, unlike these trouble makers".

He also has the confirmation of his message by "all the brothers who are with me", probably referring to the men and women who aid him in his ministry or at least in writing the letter.

And on top of that, It is *not* as though Paul's gospel is even different from Peter's gospel! They are the same gospel! It's as if now there are two or three photos of my lifting a heavy weight going around, taken at the same time but from different angles.

You what this should do for us? Give us confidence in the message of the Scriptures. Obviously no doubt lives in Paul's mind. He is writing to the churches in Galatia with this message after all! If there was any doubt as to the legitimacy or truth of the message that Paul is writing, he wouldn't be giving his life to preach it!

Paul's gospel is Christ's gospel. I hope you have confidence in God's Word. What a gift knowing that we are not preaching a message that is made up from our imaginations, but one that truly saves people because it is from God himself.

**The True Gospel comes from God, is about God, and glorifies God.**

Now we skipped right over a part of the first verse. Not that it's unimportant, it's actually very very important!

**1b) Christ's resurrection is the central theme of the gospel.**

Paul writes that he has been called as an apostle through Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

Why does Paul add that right here? It makes sense, when speaking of the work of Christ, to speak of the cross first and then the empty tomb. Paul however goes right to the fact of the empty tomb. Well I think it's because Jesus being raised from the dead is the foundation of the Christian faith!

Was Jesus an amazing teacher? Yes. Was Jesus a moral person? Yes. Was Jesus an example of godliness? Yes. All those are absolutely true, but all of those depend on the reality of his bodily resurrection.

Paul makes this point very clear to the Corinthian church. There is doubt there that resurrection is even a reality for anyone and Paul corrects them by Christ's resurrection is not just a historical fact, but absolutely necessary for the good news of Jesus to be affective at all.

If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then preaching and faith are useless. If preaching about Jesus is just a message of living your best life now, what's the point? After all, Paul points out to Timothy that anyone who wants to live a life of godliness in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Jesus himself said that foxes have holes to hide in but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head, and that those who follow him will have similar hardships. If that is the kind of life that is preached, without hope of life after death, then that is pretty useless.

We also portray God as a liar! After all, Jesus himself claimed that after three days he would be restored to life. If God had promises something and it never comes to pass, that makes God a liar. If Jesus is not bodily raised from the dead, then God is a liar.

If Jesus has not been raised from the dead then his work on the cross to save us from our sins did not work. Sin and death are connected. Sin brings death. How do we know sin is still in the world? Because death is still in the world. How do you now sin is taken away? Death is taken away. If Jesus remains in the grave and does not rise from the dead, then he himself is a sinner and our sins are not paid for, because death has not been beaten.

On top of all that. If Christ has not been raised from the dead, then death really is the end and there is no hope for any Christian who currently lies in the grave.

How pitiful are Christians, Paul argues, if Christ has not been raised from the dead?

[It would be like if we were stranded on an island out in the middle of the ocean with no hope for rescue. That would be a horrible circumstance wouldn't it? But let's suppose I turned to you and reassured you that I knew exactly how to handle this situation and we're going to be ok! What if I told you I was a survival expert and have trained for this my entire life. I can hunt for food and I know of edible plants we can eat. I know how to build a comfortable shelter and make fire and catch rain water. And to top it all off, I know how to build a boat that will take us to safety. That would be great news! Would it still be great news if in fact I had no idea about any of those things and I was just saying it to make you feel better? Of course not!]

The good news of Jesus without the resurrection is just that. The gospel is not meant to make you feel better about yourself. The gospel is meant to give you life.

Christ indeed has been raised from the dead. As a result, we are freed from our sins because death has been defeated. God is a promise keeping God. Our faith in him is rock-solid, and so is the preaching of this gospel. Because Christ has been raised from the dead, those who have trusted in Christ and have died have the hope of being resurrected unto eternal life with Christ one day.

Do you believe this gospel? If you don't, let me ask you what benefit it is for you to gain the whole world, and yet forfeit your soul to hell? Whatever you gain in this life, be it riches or fame or power or whatever else will be stripped from you and you will lose everything as you stand before Christ and are judged by your rebellion against him.

Rather, today, forfeit whatever this world has to offer and gain Christ. Believe in his resurrection and gain your resurrection unto eternal life with Christ. Do you see that Christ's resurrection is the central theme of the gospel?

**The True Gospel comes from God, is about God, and glorifies God.**

### **3-4a) Christ has secured for us peace and grace from God.**

At first glance verse 3 does not initially jump out at us. It seems that Paul is just giving a normal greeting. And he is, but he's doing more than that. It would have been completely normal back in those days to start your letter off with a getting of peace. It's not unlike today if you were going to send an email to a friend who is far off to begin with "hello friend, I hope you are doing well". So in a normal letter it wouldn't be unusual to read "peace to you...", but Paul writes "*grace* and peace to you".

It's a sincere desire that the Galatian churches have grace and peace from (and with!) God.

He writes this because that's exactly what the gospel gives us. It gives us peace with God and from God, and God's immeasurable grace. The implication here is that apart from Christ, we do not have peace and grace!

The Bible is very clear that there is no one who is righteous, not even one. Everyone has fallen short of God's glory, his standard. Every person has gone astray and has rebelled against God. Because of our sin we have made ourselves enemies of God. We do not have peace with God! Sin breaks peace.

You know this by experience. When has sin ever made a relationship better?

[One of the joys of being a pastoral couple is that Alana and I have been able to do some pre-marital counseling. It's fun and often encouraging to walk with young couples as they begin marriage. One thing that we stress quite strongly in pre-marital sessions is the need to develop a habit of forgiveness. It is inevitable that husbands and wives will sin against each other, and that sin needs to be dealt with. We encourage couples to develop the habit of as quickly as possible when your sin is pointed out, to ask your spouse for forgiveness. And similarly, to develop the habit to as quickly as possible offer forgiveness and grace when you are sinned against. This develops trust, and peace. The opposite results when sin is not properly dealt with. If there is no sincere repentance, and no sincere offer of forgiveness, it only leads to distrust and anger and hostility.]

It's the same with God. He did not sin against us obviously, but we have sure sinned against him. As a result, we are not at peace with him.

In Christ however, that sin can be dealt with. Look at verse 4. Christ "...gave himself for our sins..."

Christ's death on the cross dealt with our sin. See the penalty of our sin is death (physical and spiritual). We already saw that sin brings death. Except in Christ there is no sin. He fully and completely obeyed God's law. He therefore is the only one who does not need to die. So by dying on the cross, he takes upon himself your sins and mine. And because now the sins of the world are laid upon Jesus, God's wrath and punishment for sin goes onto Christ. He has become a sacrifice for sins.

And so, for the person who trusts in Jesus to take their sins upon himself, what punishment and wrath for sin is left for the believer? None! The result is peace with God. Paul adds grace here because the means by which we get this peace is a *gift* from God. It cannot be purchased or earned, but only received as a gift by faith in Jesus.

And it gets better! Paul goes on to say in verse 4 that Christ gave himself for our sins "to rescue us from the present evil age." The picture here is multifaceted. It refers to being rescued from the evils of the world that seek to destroy us. It refers to being rescued from our own sin that we loved so much and yet seeks to destroy us. It also refers to being rescued from this broken world and having the hope of a New Heavens and New Earth. Paul is laying the groundwork here for the theme throughout this letter of being free in Christ.

How can we not think here of the Israelites in Egypt. They are slaves to Pharaoh who brutally oppresses them. God, by his mighty power, frees the Israelite from Egypt and brings them through the parted waters. But that's not where the story ends. God does not just save them *from* something, he also saves them *to* something. He saves them, gives them his good and life-giving laws, and brings them into the Promised-Land. It is the same thing for us. Christ frees us from this evil age, out of the slavery of sin, but also saves us *to* holy living in Christ and we are on the journey to the ultimate Promised Land of the New Heavens and the New Earth.

And all of this, not because any of us (nor the Israelites) are or were in any way special or better, but because God had mercy on us to shower his grace upon us.

The gospel really us about God. He is the hero, not us. Yes, we benefit from the gospel, but don't misunderstand that it is all about God and his work.

[It would be like if someone gave you a gift of a gold bar worth a million dollars. You then go and tell your friend about this gift. What do you think your friend is going to ask you? They will ask you "who gave you the gift?" Why? Because the giver is worthy of greater glory than the receiver. Did you benefit? You sure did! But the value of the gift reflects the worthiness of the giver.]

How infinitely more so is that true of God. The gospel, though we benefit from it, really is all about the glory of God.

**The True Gospel comes from God, is about God, and glorifies God.**

**4b-5) God's sovereign will glorifies him in all things.**

And not surprisingly, that exactly what Paul concludes this part with. The last part of verse 4, and verse 5 show us that Paul considers that God's sovereign will brings him glory in all things.

Notice that all that Jesus has accomplished, and we could add all of history, is according to God's sovereign will. God is not a man that he should change his mind. God had planned the coming of Christ, the cross, and his resurrection from eternity past. And, it is important to understand, even your salvation.

It glorified God to predestine you for salvation before the foundation of the world. That does not negate our responsibility to respond to the gospel in faith, but it does mean that your being a Christian was planned by God and it ultimately glorifies him.

Let that sink in. If that does not lead you to thankfulness and the desire to give him all the glory, then you need to think deeper about your salvation.

God does all things for his glory, including saving you and me.

Now if that were to be said of anyone else, that would sound horrible. Imagine I said to you I do all things for my own glory. We understand that narcissistic and prideful. So how is that not prideful for God? The simple answer is because God truly is the most glorious thing! Were God to work for the glory of another, then it would be idolatry for him! For God it's not pride, it's simply the truth!

[What if I was talking to you one day and told you about this amazing restaurant. That it was the most amazing restaurant in the world. In fact, that it was the best restaurant in the world. You of course would want to go. Suppose you went there and they microwaved you some leftover Kraft Dinner. The praise I gave the restaurant would be a lie and undeserved. But suppose you decided to go one day, and in fact it was exactly like I said it was and even better. Did that restaurant deserve the glory I gave it? Yes! Did you benefit from the goodness of the restaurant? Yes!]

When something beautiful is glorified, we all benefit. When God is glorified above all, it is to our joy. God's glory and our joy go hand in hand.

This is why it is imperative to understand that the Gospel of Christ, and yes even your salvation, is primarily about God's glory.

This is the gospel. Can you taste the difference between the true gospel and a false gospel?

**The True Gospel comes from God, is about God, and glorifies God.**