

I came across a question a short time ago that piqued my interest: What are the most influential documents in human history? Hammurabi's Code, Plato's Republic, Magna Carta, Luther's 95 Theses, Newton's Principia, Slave Trade Act 1807/Emancipation Proclamation 1863, Communist Manifesto, Darwin's Origin of Species. Interesting inclusions: Romeo & Juliet (shaping ideas about love & romance), Canterbury Tales (shaping and popularizing English language). Religious texts: Bible, Gita, Koran, Torah.

You've probably been mulling the question over and adding a few of your own. I wonder if any of you thought of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Galatians—the 9th book of the NT, 6 chapters of dynamite tucked in between Corinthians and Ephesians. This little document has exercised enormous influence on Christian theology, Pauline studies, and even the history of Christianity. Martin Luther said, "The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine." John and Charles Wesley, founders of Methodism, were converted pondering its message.

Why so important?

- Galatians helps us put our Bibles together—specifically, explains the purpose of the OT Law, the nature of God's promise to Abraham, and how everything comes to fulfillment in Christ.
- It establishes a vision for everyday Christian living—conduct in line with the gospel (2:14), faith working through love (5:6), use liberty to serve one another (5:13), walk in the Spirit (5:16ff).
- It clarifies and establishes the gospel:

1:6-7 *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.*

2:16 *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

Galatians is an emphatic reminder that every generation is at risk for losing its grip on the gospel. The gospel is under constant attack—from

within the church and without, I'd even say within our own soul and without. The world denies it, the devil hates it, and our flesh can't believe it.

What the Galatians needed – and what we need – is not more truth different from the gospel. They needed to grasp the full significance and live out the implications of the gospel.

"The gospel is not just the ABCs of the Christian life. It's the A-Z of the Christian life." (Keller)

"Growth is not stepping out from the gospel, but rather stepping out with the gospel." (Goldsworthy, *Acc to Plan*, 219)

We are a church that believes we need the gospel every day, and here it is! God has done something for us that we could never do for ourselves. We are hopelessly eternally lost, but God has provided a rescue in Christ. We are a complete mess, but our future is incredibly bright because of Jesus. And anyone can get in on this for free!

All people need to hear the gospel. NonChristians need to learn it and become convinced of it. Christians need help staying convinced of it. And Galatians can help us all! My prayer as I've prepared for this series is that it will ignite an explosion of freedom, growth, joy, evangelism, and worship in your lives and in our church. What sins would fall away from your life if you could truly grasp your new identity in Jesus? What power and courage might you have for evangelism if you felt joy and awe at what God has done for you all the way down to your toenails? What humility and graciousness might we feel toward one another if we could finally feel that we were accepted and loved by God ourselves? What hunger to know God and live for Him if you understood how relentlessly He has moved through history to have you and how He has done away with everything that could possibly stand against you? This and more is what God offers us in Galatians.

Quick background: The Book of Acts records several missionary journeys by Paul and companions, preaching the gospel and establishing churches. Paul followed up with letters, superintending, counseling, and extending his teaching. Galatians is his earliest letter, written around AD 48-9, to a group of churches (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe) he founded in present-day Turkey (Acts 13-14).

Today we're going to examine his greeting, vv1-5. Paul always opens with a traditional greeting (e.g., "Dear ---"), following a standard form which he modifies to suit his own purposes. Galatians is his longest. In it, he sets out the main themes of the rest of the letter:

- Whom should we trust (for definitive answers)?
- Who does the work (to get us right before God)?
- Who gets the acclaim (for any greatness in our lives)?

If I had to put each in 1 word, it would be: authority, initiative, credit. What we'll find in today's text is that that answer to each question is GOD! As I've phrased it in the title: Through God, From God, To God.

THROUGH GOD

vv1-2 *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 brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:*

A key issue throughout this book—and for us still today—is where can we get definitive answers about life, God, morality, justice? It's the question of authority, and Paul tackles it right out of the gate by naming his own credentials.

Actually, "credential." He lists only one: "apostle." What's that? It's not a term applies to just any believer like "saint" or "brother." Rather, it refers to people commissioned for a specific purpose, literally "sent ones" (comes from verb meaning "to commission/send"). Occasionally it's used for people sent by churches for some special purpose. But most often it's reserved for men chosen and commissioned by Jesus Himself:

Mark 3:14-15 *And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. (cf. Lk 6:13)*

In other words, the apostles were men personally selected, trained, and sent by Jesus Himself. It would appear Paul couldn't share those same credentials – he didn't follow Jesus during the Savior's lifetime on earth. But notice what he says next in v1:

v1 *Paul, an apostle - not from men nor through man...*

He makes two abrupt, immediate, and emphatic denials about how he became an apostle.

- "not from men" = No group appointed him—the Sanhedrin, the

original 12, any church

- "nor through man" = no individual confirmed his position, suggested the idea to him

If no people were involved in Paul's calling, where did it originate?

v1 *...not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father*

Paul claims his apostleship came directly through God Himself: "Jesus Christ and God the Father." Here's what he's claiming: even though he didn't follow Jesus during the Savior's earthly life, he was still selected, trained, and commissioned by Jesus, just like the other 12 apostles. He'll get into it extensively in the next few chapters. For now all I'll say is that you can read the story in Acts 9 (cf. 22:1-21, 26:12-18):

Acts 26:13-18 *At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴ And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' ¹⁵ And I said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And the Lord said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶ But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you, ¹⁷ delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles- to whom I am sending you ¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'"*

Paul was personally selected and commissioned by Jesus. Two more details he lists to bolster his claim:

v1 *...through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead*

Here is an essential component of the gospel: Jesus is alive! No Good News apart from that. Paul's already stating and clarifying the gospel. He's also hinting at what will be his major line of argument: namely, that Jesus' followers are now, already, right here, citizens of the future "Age to Come." The Galatians wanted to turn back the clock and submit themselves again to the Law of Moses; Paul emphatically argues that that age has passed, its purpose has been fulfilled with the coming of Christ. Resurrection signals the in-breaking of the new Age to Come.

v2 *and all the brothers who are with me...*

Solidarity. Consensus. These other men aren't apostles, but they are Christian brothers. Even though Paul is an apostle, he's not alone in his

understanding of the gospel.

Why does Paul's apostleship matter? Because the credibility of the Gospel itself is at stake. If he's speaking on his own authority, these readers – and we along with them – can and should reject what he writes. We can and should reject his “so-called” Good News. But if he is an apostle, he speaks for Jesus Himself and what follows is an authoritative clarification of what the gospel is. Paul's statements here—harsh and exclusive though they may be—are not Paul's own prejudice or intolerance. He is writing the very word of God.

Where can we find definitive answers about life, God, morality, justice? Here is an authoritative word from God Himself. God is there, and He is not silent! He has spoken. There is absolute truth in the world, and you can know what it is!

- This is the opposite of Ecclesiastes! We saw what happens when you approach life that way – vanity!
- It's a different answer than we'll find anywhere in the world. Our culture suggests many different sources of truth: tradition, reason, scientific observation, personal instinct.

But how can you know for certain which is right?

ILLUS: Aundrea and I attended a Holocaust Remembrance Service last week at the gracious invitation of a new friend. A theme in that meeting was “Never again! We must stand against all forms of hatred, evil, and discrimination.” To which I wholeheartedly say, “Amen!” Thankful our governor was there supporting this important message. But never did anyone address the underlying question: What is evil? How do we define it? Where do we draw the lines? Science tells us what IS, not what SHOULD BE. Our instincts and reason easily mislead us (e.g., the Nazis themselves, helicopter parents).

Whom should we trust (for definitive answers)? God. He has spoken. He has revealed His word to His apostles and recorded it in a book. Galatians helps us with the problem of authority.

FROM GOD

Who does the work (to get us right before God)? Galatians answers

emphatically: God does! Salvation is of the Lord, from beginning to end. It is entirely of His initiative.

vv3-4 *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...*

There's absolute glory in these verses. I'll try to unpack it, phrase by phrase.

First, Paul names the source and nature of salvation: “Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Grace is how God saves us; peace is what He saves us to.

“Grace.” This is the most severe letter Paul wrote. He make some incredibly harsh statements. He has lightning and thunder flashing from his pen. Yet he opens with grace! Grace is free favor and transforming power from God. The Galatians are in danger of rejecting both.

It's no wonder—grace is hard to accept, even for us. Grace turns reality as we know it on its head. Our whole lives are geared toward performance. (In the specific situation of this book, it's the performance of keeping the OT Law.) Report cards, job reviews, evaluations, competitions—from the time we're kids, our performance is measured, ranked, and publicized. You're constantly told your performance determines who you are and what you can expect from life: “Do well and you'll be rewarded.” So what are we even supposed to do with a message that says that's not really how life is at all? What if what matters most about your life is nothing you've done? What if what matters most is what God has chosen to do for you in Jesus?! What if the only way you could mess this up is if you insist on bringing what you've done to the bargaining table and insisting that God recognize it?

“Peace.” In our culture, peace might mean inner tranquility – i.e., “peace of mind.” Or it might mean the absence of conflict – i.e., “peace and quiet.” But the biblical idea is much richer than either of these. Peace in the biblical view is *shalom*, a condition in which human life can best be lived, where everything necessary for human flourishing is in place. It means, in short, that a person in this condition fulfills his/her purpose with God, others, and the world. It doesn't promise a life free from struggle and hardship. It means that, since peace with God is

achieved, the rest will take care of itself. Everything else is guaranteed. If you have peace from God, you can be sure that someday soon, you will be at peace with everything else.

How does God establish this peace? Verse 4 describes the great event:

v4 *who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,*

“Gave himself” implies loving, willing, voluntary self-sacrifice. No one took His life from Him; He laid it down of His own accord. On the cross, Jesus died a brutal, humiliating death. But they didn’t drag Him there under force; He went there willingly. Roman soldiers who performed crucifixions were accustomed to working as a team—several men holding the criminal down while another soldier secured him to the cross. Not so with Jesus. You wonder what that soldier thought as this Man stretched His arms out voluntarily and held them there as the spikes were driven in, what they said to each other later, recalling how He crossed His own legs above the wooden post and yielded them to that nail for His feet.

“FOR our sins.” This little preposition contains the essence of the gospel. In Greek it means “on behalf of,” and it calls to mind the OT sin-offering where an animal would be sacrificed in place of the offending sinner. But in this case, it’s no animal. It’s Jesus, doing this in the place of someone else. How does salvation work? Three words: **satisfaction through substitution**. The Romans and Jews killed Jesus for their own reasons, but God took His death as the atoning sacrifice for sins. God did what we would have no right to do—He shifted blame for sin to Jesus. God pointed the finger. He laid all that guilt on Christ Himself. The Bible does not teach that God will someday pour out wrath on certain deserving sinners and withhold it from other deserving sinners who are called “Christians.” He always vents His wrath fully and completely. The gospel says He did it on Jesus and not on you (cf. 3:13 “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us”). That’s what this word “for” means. Substitution. It was Jesus’ innocence for our guilt. His submission for our rebellion. His trust for our unbelief. His honor for our shame.

“To deliver us.” THIS is the gospel – not information, not inspiration, not self-help. The gospel is good news about *rescue*! Other world religions

were founded by a man (or woman) who came to teach. Jesus certainly did some teaching, but His main mission was to rescue! Krishna, Buddha, Joseph Smith, Confucius, Mohammed were teachers, philosophers, leaders. Jesus was a Savior.

“From the present evil age.” Present Evil Age vs. Age to Come – gospel tells us the future age has broken into time and exists here and now in partial form (the point of Paul’s reference to the resurrection in v1). Christian conversion means being brought into a whole new order of life, where the Spirit operates, grace reigns, and Jesus is Lord. Christianity is living the life of the future right now in the present.

“According to the will of our God and Father.” The gospel doesn’t pit the kind and gentle Jesus against the angry and judgmental God. It was His plan from the beginning. Imagine the Father and Son planning this event...

TO GOD

v5 *[...according to the will of our God and Father,] ⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

If we contributed, we can claim glory. But we didn’t. It came at God’s initiative—God’s desire, God’s plan, God’s action, God’s call.

What good news the Gospel is—even this, where God gets all the credit and we get all the benefit.

It’s Good News because it connects us to a Person bigger than ourselves, and everybody longs to get around true greatness. The gospel says, “It’s not all about you. It’s about God.”

It’s Good News because it turns us on to a cause bigger than our own happiness, namely, the unstoppable advance of God’s eternal kingdom on this earth; and everybody longs to live for something truly meaningful. The gospel says, “Forget your pitiful attempts at empire building, and come live for a cause that even hell can’t stop and even eternity won’t erase.”

We are a complete mess, but our future is incredibly bright because of Jesus. And anybody can get in on this for free!!