

## **Galatians 1 – Freedom Through Christ** **Pastor Joe Oakley - GFC 9-1-2024**

Today we begin our verse-by-verse study through the book of Galatians. The title of this series is Freedom Through Christ.

Many of what we call New Testament books are actually epistles, or letters written to an individual, a church or a group. The letter to the Galatians was written by the Apostle Paul, who had been previously known as Saul – a Jewish Pharisee who persecuted the early church until he had an encounter with the resurrected Christ on the road to Damascus. He was going there to persecute Christians – but he was blinded by a light from heaven and had an encounter with Jesus Christ that changed his life forever. He got radically saved! He became a new man! Saul became the apostle Paul. He went on to take the Gospel to the known world and write 13 books of the New Testament, including Galatians.

Paul's letter to the Galatians is one of the most significant books of the Bible. Some describe it as the Declaration of Independence of Christian Liberty because the **theme is freedom, mainly freedom from works oriented Christianity.**

There are **three major errors concerning God's law** that have been around since the beginning of the church – and three books of the Bible were written to correct those errors. **The first error is legalism** which teaches we are saved by keeping the law. Paul addressed this in Romans.

**The second error regarding the law is license.** The theological term is antinomianism, which means against the law. This error teaches that we are not under the law – we are under grace - so it doesn't matter how we live. The book of James addresses this. We taught through James last year.

**The third error regarding the law is called Galatianism.** It teaches that we are saved by grace, but we only stay saved if we keep the law. Obviously, the book of Galatians addresses this.

I want to give you some background about who the Galatians were and why Paul wrote them. The letter to the Galatians was written to churches in Galatia, which was a Roman province in Asia Minor – which is modern day Turkey. Paul visited Galatia on all three of his missionary journeys. Acts 16:6 says:

***Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia.***

Acts 18:23 says that at a later time:

***Paul traveled from place to place throughout the region of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening all the disciples.***

But at some point, some false teachers called Judaizers began to influence the believers in Galatia. The Judaizers taught that Gentiles who became Christians must observe at the regulations of the Law of Moses. They taught that they must be circumcised and follow Jewish rituals and observe the feasts. It was almost like they must become Jews before becoming Christians.

**The main point of their teaching was that to be made right with God, it is not enough to have faith in Jesus Christ; one must also obey the Law of Moses. This is the main issue Paul addresses in Galatians.**

And this letter is not just cold doctrine. Rather, it is intensely personal. Paul founded the churches in Galatia and he considered them to be his children. So, he was deeply troubled by their receptiveness to this false doctrine. He wrote the Galatians to be faithful to the Good News which they had received and therefore to remain free in the life of the Spirit.

The Judaizers also declared that Paul was NOT an apostle, that he had had NO personal revelation of Christ. They wanted the Galatian churches to submit to their authority and their so-called revelation. So Paul challenges this right from the start of the letter by saying in Galatians 1:1-2

***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,***

In his greeting, Paul established his authority by stating that he was an apostle called by God, not by men. There were people in those days – and there are people today – who believe that only the original 12 disciples can be called apostles. But that's not biblical because the New Testament mentions many others who are called apostles.

**The word apostle means a sent out one.** It refers to someone who is sent out as a representative and who has authority to make certain decisions and to act on behalf of the sender. It is equivalent to our word "ambassador," describing an individual who represents another government by carrying authority and a message.

In the Bible, that word apostle refers to the original 12, the group of 70, Matthias, Paul and 11 others including Barnabas, Silas and James. **There are a total of 95 people in the New Testament who are called apostles.** And the ministry of the apostle continues to this day.

Some people believe that apostles and prophets are no longer valid ministries in the church today. But Ephesians 4 says they are needed until we are in perfect unity and we become like Christ. In case you haven't noticed – we aren't there yet! So, **all the 5-fold ministers are still needed today, including apostles!**

Wherever false apostles were threatening Paul's apostleship, he rose up like a spiritual father to defend his position. His children in the Lord were in jeopardy and his love for them would not allow him to remain silent. Paul was determined not to allow those deceivers to destroy his credibility so they could ravage the sheep under his care. That's why Paul says in Galatians 1:1-2

***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,***

The Old Testament rarely refers to God as Father. However, when Jesus came on the scene He introduced God as Father. He referred to God as Father more than 170 times. He taught us to pray, "Our Father Who art in heaven." So Paul is telling the Galatians that He was made an apostle by Father God and His Son Jesus – who was raised from the dead.

He included that because **the resurrection is the proof that Jesus is God's Son.** Romans 1:4 says that Jesus: ***...was declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead:***

1 Corinthians 15:17 says: ***If Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins.***

The message of the resurrection is the heart of Christianity!

Paul includes in his greeting ***The brothers with me...***

Paul understood team ministry. When you read the Bible you almost never see Paul ministering alone. It was Paul AND Barnabas, Paul AND Titus, Paul AND Timothy.

Paul almost always had people with Him. Jesus had people with Him. And we need people with us.

**We need friends but we also need a Paul – who in mentoring us – and a Timothy – who we are mentoring. That way we are taking in and giving out.**

Then Paul tells us who he is writing to: ***To the churches in Galatia:***

I've already explained where those churches were.

Then Paul says in verse 3:

***Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ,***

This was a common greeting in those times. Paul uses that same greeting in most of his letters.

Why did Paul so often use these two words in his greetings when he wrote his epistles? The answer is quite simple. Because he was an apostle to the Gentiles

or the Greek-speaking world, it was necessary for him to greet his readers in a customary Greek manner which was to say, “Grace!” when greeting one another.

But Paul wasn’t only addressing the Greek world. As a Jew, he also wanted to greet the Jewish world that would read his letters. The customary way that Jews greeted one another was to say, “Shalom!” which means peace, well-being and health. In fact, this is still the customary greeting for Jews today.

By using both of these greetings at the beginning of his epistles, Paul reached out and embraced both the Greek and the Jewish worlds.

But in addition - **grace is primarily a Christian word describing God's unmerited, unearned favor.** So – right at the beginning of this letter – Paul establishes the priority of grace over works.

In verse 2 Paul said that he was called by the Father and the Son. Now he says that grace and peace come from the Father and the Son. We are saved by grace through faith. And we experience peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

In verse 4, Paul says that Jesus:

***...gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.***

Notice that Jesus gave Himself. No one took His life from Him; He willingly gave His life for us. Jesus said in John 10:17-18

***The reason my Father loves Me is that I lay down my life — only to take it up again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.***

Jesus gave His life because it was according to the will of our God and Father. It was the will of God for Jesus to die for our sins to save us.

There are people who get upset with Jews because they think they are “Christ killers.” I say, “Hold on a minute. So you’re upset that Jesus was crucified?” **Jesus willingly died because it was the will of God to bring salvation to us through the death of His Son.**

We aren’t upset by that – we rejoice in that because the Bible teaches that apart from Christ we are lost. We need to be saved from the penalty of our sin. **The hope of salvation and eternal life is found only in Christ.** His sacrificial death is the only way our salvation could be accomplished. There are not multiple ways to be saved.

On the night He was betrayed, Jesus prayed in Matthew 26:39

***My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from Me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.***

In the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus struggled with His own flesh over this decision to give His life for our sins. Thank God He won that battle! He willingly gave His life to die in our place!

Now – let me ask a question to those who believe there are many ways of salvation. Why would God say any way to Me will do – you can reach me through belief in any religion - but one of those ways will be to have my Son beaten, tortured and killed in a long slow agonizing death on a cross? It would be crazy to make that one of an infinite number of ways.

And **there is no other way because God limits salvation to belief in the finished work of Christ on the cross.** That's why Jesus said in John 14:6

***I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.***

Notice Jesus said I am THE WAY, not a way or one way among many. He is the one and only way to be saved. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 says:

***For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all —***

I want you to think of what the death of Christ accomplished for us. The sacrificial death of Christ: Saves us from our sins - Saves us from hell - Saves us from ourselves. Titus 2:14 says it saves us from all wickedness. And Galatians 1:4 says that Jesus:

***...gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age,***

I love movies about rescue missions – like 13 Lives which is the story of the Thai soccer team that got trapped in a cave and had to be rescued. But **the greatest rescue mission in history was when God sent His Son to earth to rescue us from sin, self and hell. This is the main theme of the gospel and of the letter to the Galatians.**

When Paul says God will rescue us from this present evil age, he is not just talking about when we go to heaven after we die. Yes, that is the ultimate rescue, but **God wants to deliver us from this present evil age even while we are still in it!**

Christ died to save us from the penalty of sin and the guilt of sin, but He also died to save us from the power of sin. Dan Boeger's Interpreted New Testament says:

***Jesus freed us from being enslaved to the evil ways that dominate people who belong to this present world.***

This present age is ruled by evil forces. This is what Paul taught about in Ephesians 6:12-13

***For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.***

The rulers of this present age are not content to perish in their own corruption, but they try to drag all people with them to destruction. **One of the main beliefs of this evil age is that you can be accepted by God by means of good works.** In fact, every religion except Christianity bases salvation upon the good works of the worshipper.

The Judaizers were part of the present evil age. Their system, not content with dragging down its own devotees to destruction, was attempting to pull down the Christian Church with it.

Paul says that only Jesus can rescue the poor lost sinner from the clutches of this present darkness, including the evil teachings of the Judaizers. Thank God for that rescue!

That is good news and that is why Paul says in verse 5:

***All glory to God forever and ever! Amen.***

Glory is a word meaning honor, praise and worship. Paul is saying, May God be praised and worship and may He receive all the honor that is due Him and Him alone.

The word Amen does not mean “the end of the prayer.” Amen is a Hebrew word meaning, “truly, so be it.” Many times in the Bible Jesus says: Verily I say unto you. Newer translations say Truly I say unto you. The Hebrew word used there for verily truly is amen.

So Paul is saying that **all glory truly belongs to God.**

It truly belongs to Him and no one else.

It truly belongs to Him above all else.

It truly belongs to Him forever and ever.

The false doctrines that were being taught by the Judaizers robbed God of some of the glory that was due Him. That’s because the false gospel was dependent upon man’s works, rather than God’s grace!

A Gospel of works requires man's power and ability, rather than total dependence upon God's power and ability! A gospel of works requires man's strength, not just God's strength. So a gospel of works allows the person who works for salvation some of the glory that comes from salvation.

But salvation is not of works - it is all of grace – and as a result the true gospel gives glory to God and God alone!

Colossians 1:12-14 also tells us what to glory in.

***Give thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in Light. For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.***

Notice that these things are past tense. We are rescued! We have redemption! We are forgiven.

Also notice that we have been rescued and transferred. These are military terms that described what happened when one empire won a victory over another. They would take the population of the defeated country and transfer every man, woman and child to the conqueror's land.

Or think back to when God delivered the Children of Israel from Egypt. Not only did He set them free – He also transferred them to the Promised Land!

That is what Paul is saying here - God has rescued us and transferred us.  
 He rescued us from darkness and transferred us to light!  
 He rescued us from hopelessness and transferred us to hope!  
 He rescued us from slavery and transferred us to freedom!  
 He rescued us from condemnation and transferred us to forgiveness!  
 He rescued us from the kingdom of Satan and transferred us to the kingdom of His dear Son!

Not because of our works – but because of Christ's work on the cross.  
 Not because of our power – but because of the resurrection power of Christ.  
 Not because we qualified ourselves – but we are saved by Christ – forgiven by Christ – redeemed by Christ.

**When you boil it all down - it's not about us at all! It's about Jesus Christ who is above all! He is the source of true freedom.**