

Free: The Message of Galatians Then & Now

Lesson One – Set Free!

Galatians 1:1-10

In Galatians, [Paul] will spare no emotion to challenge all who read his epistle to experience, to the max, the freedom Christ's redemptive sacrifice affords, lest He has died in vain. The message of Galatians then is the same message now - live free! (*Free: The Message of Galatians Then & Now*, p 16).

The early Christians in Jerusalem were Jewish. However, as the gospel spread outward the number of Gentiles that received Jesus as Lord was ever increasing. Consequently, a group of teachers in Galatia were insistent that Gentile believers practice all the traditional ceremonial customs of the Law of Moses. They taught that Gentiles had to observe all the dietary laws and be circumcised to be fully accepted and pleasing to God the Father. This heresy, a mixture of law and grace, adds good works to the sacrifice of Jesus. Their message, in stark contrast to the Apostle Paul's message of salvation by grace through faith, left these new converts in a state of confusion. We can only imagine the ache in Paul's heart as he watches false teachers delude new believers. Jesus had warned His people, "Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Paul will explain to us that the truths of the gospel change life from top to bottom; that they transform our hearts, our thinking and our approach to absolutely everything. The gospel—the message that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope—creates a radical new dynamic for personal growth, for obedience, for love (Tim Keller, *Galatians for You*, p. 4-5).

As I read Paul's letter to the Galatians, I can almost hear him shouting at his readers, "What is wrong with you people? We are free!" Often referred to as the Christian Magna Carta or the believer's Emancipation Proclamation, Paul wastes little time defending the cornerstone doctrine of the Christian life, which is salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone. First Peter 1:18-19 says, "...You were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." Through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, God has set us free. Free from the shackles of sin, self, and Satan.

I. Apostolic Authority (Galatians 1:1-2)

Paul asserts his authority as an apostle "not sent from men nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the death" (Galatians 1:1). One of the requirements for an apostle was that he had to have witnessed the resurrection. During Christ's incarnation, Paul was neither a disciple (literally "learner") or an apostle (literally "one who is sent with a commission"), but he had seen the risen Lord and had been commissioned by Him. His apostleship was not from human selection, but was the result of a divine calling. Therefore, he had the authority to deal with problems created by the Judaizers in the Galatian churches.

II. Thumbnail Theology (Galatians 1:3-5)

Paul gives us a thumbnail sketch of the gospel. It is similar to his "gospel in a nutshell" in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures."

A. We were helpless and in need of rescue. Ephesians 2:1 says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins."

B. Jesus died a sacrificial death to redeem us "from this present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). That is, He "gave Himself for our sins" (Galatians 1:4). Jesus died in our place. God "made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:21).

C. God accepted the sacrifice of Jesus. This was all "according to the will of our God and Father" to bring us salvation. Praise God "to whom be the glory forever. Amen" (Galatians 1:4). Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Grace and peace are the extraordinary gifts God extended to us through Christ. These two expressions were commonly used separately as part of a greeting, even by unbelievers. However, when used together in connection with the context of the gospel, they gained unfathomable depth.

Grace is God's unmerited favor that was lavished upon us at the cross. It is God's kindness extended to a most undeserving people. Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us; in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." Not only does God mercifully withhold the judgment that we so clearly

deserve, He offers grace to us which entails the forgiveness of sin, salvation, and eternal life. As guilty sinners, we deserve hell and eternal damnation. Were it not for grace, we would stand condemned, hopeless, and helpless before a holy God. But rather than judgment, God has extended grace. It cannot be earned by any amount of religious activity, ritual, or works of righteousness. Grace is a free gift offered to us through Christ's substitutionary and sacrificial death. Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!

The word *peace* was a familiar greeting commonly used in salutations. Combined with the word *grace*, Paul reminds us of one of the greatest results of living in the realm of God's grace. Peace is the reality of abiding grace. It is the quiet sense of wellbeing, born of a cleansed conscience and right standing before God. It is the growing awareness of the joy of the Lord that bubbles forth from knowing the forgiveness of sin and the unlimited possibilities that belong to the redeemed. Grace gifts us the peace of God "which surpasses all comprehension" (Philippians 4:7).

III. Righteous Indignation (Galatians 1:6-10)

Paul grieves that the gospel of grace was being exchanged for a gospel of works, which is not gospel at all, but a falsification of God's truth, which leads to damnation rather than salvation. With pen blazing, Paul offers no word of commendation to the Galatian church, although that was his habit. Instead, after a brief salutation, Paul launches into a litany of doctrinal truth to combat the heresy that was rapidly encroaching on the church of Jesus Christ.

Paul has every reason to be concerned for the fledgling churches in Galatia. His passion for the truth and pity for his deluded little children in the faith is nearly palpable as his burning words flow from his quill onto his parchment in staccato-like fashion. You get the sense of his quick pen flashing madly as the words of correction pour out of his anguished heart and spill onto the page.

Paul was astonished that the Galatians were so quickly turning from the gospel of grace to embrace a lie. How could those who had been delivered from the bondage of law exchange their freedom in Christ for a system of slavery dependent upon human effort?

"Paul is not amazed that there are false teachers; he is amazed that the Galatians are being enticed by them" (*Free: The Message of Galatians Then & Now*, p 31).

To alter the gospel message, even the tiniest bit, is a distortion of the truth and negates the message of salvation by grace through faith. If any, even an angel from heaven, brings a different gospel - which is no gospel at all - he is worthy of eternal condemnation. Paul uses strong language because he is dealing with a life or death situation.

The real gospel, the saving gospel, is the gospel that centers in Christ. Not one that mentions Him. Not one that alludes to Him. But it is one that has a vital relationship with Jesus Christ. Being saved is a personal confrontation with Jesus. It's not a creed, not a code, not a cause, not a church, but Christ (Dr. Adrian Rogers, from sermon *The Gospel Truth*).

Christ has set us free! "If the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).
Hallelujah! What a Savior!