

Title: **The Opening Salutation: The Gospel of Grace**

Text: **Galatians 1:1-5**

Theme: The gospel of grace is through Christ to the objects of His love. Only the gospel has the power to deliver the believer from this present evil age. What God has chosen to do in time He planned from eternity past.

Introduction: “In the days of the Reformation, this epistle had great influence on Martin Luther, and his lectures on it in 1531 are still preserved. He said of it: ‘The Epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine.’” (Martin Luther, *Galatians*, editor’s preface, 5).

“The book of Galatians has been called the “Magna Charta of Christian Liberty.” (Everyone refers to this idea. I have no idea as to who initial made this statement).

“Galatians is one of the fundamental documents of the Christian faith. It is the classic vindication of the Gospel of justification by faith. Its impact upon the faith of the Church is inestimable.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two – The Pauline Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1954], 89).

While it is one of the shorter of Paul's epistles, it is not unimportant. The book of Galatians is the strongest declaration of justification by faith alone in the Scriptures. It is unique among the epistles of Paul in that it is the only epistle that begins without the characteristic thanksgiving, there is **no greeting**, and not even a request that the Galatians pray for Paul. Most assume that this lack was because of the seriousness of the problems that confronted the Galatians (emphasis added).” Paul’s letter follows normal opening comments for Greek letters with one exception, there is no word of commendation.

The issue is too great and the time too urgent to delay with pleasantries. Paul sets the tone and sounds the battle cry. Paul is preparing for war. He has unsheathed his sword.

“Someone has likened the letter to the Galatians to a sword flashing in a great swordsman’s hand.” (William Barclay, *Galatians*, 3). “Galatians is an epistle of conflict.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two – The Pauline Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1954], 89).

Its Eternal Value:

In my preparation to speak I wondered why Paul would commend the Corinthian church with all of its “carnality” yet deny the churches of Galatia any positive affirmation. The difference is in Corinth the issue was right living whereas in Galatia it is right doctrine. “In the Galatian churches the very heart of the gospel was being undermined by false teachers.” (John F. MacArthur, *Galatians*, x).

Martin Luther said, “For the one doctrine which I have supremely at heart, is that of faith in Christ, from whom, through whom and unto whom all my theological thinking flows back and forth day and night.” (Martin Luther, *Galatians*, 16).

The Present Danger:

There is a latent problem in reading Galatians today and that is to limit the significance of Galatians only to one’s justification and not see how it plays into one’s sanctification. It is possible to be “gracious” in justification, but to be “legalistic” in one’s sanctification. Herein is a present danger.

The Storyline:

Jesus Christ is the center piece of all biblical revelation. He is the hero in Galatians. His placement in justification is no different than that in sanctification. He is the object around which the church rotates. He is the promised seed of Abraham and His offspring are many and glorious.

Question:

1. What did Paul mean when he said “apostle”?
2. How did Paul receive his apostleship?
3. What is the significance of this apostleship in light of his message to the Galatian Church?
4. Did Paul speak alone concerning the truth of the gospel?
5. From whom do we receive grace and peace?
6. Why does grace precede peace and could it be reversed?
7. How is the grace of God shown in verses 4 and 5?
8. What was the consequence of Christ’s substitutionary death?
9. Was it God’s will that Jesus die and His people delivered?
10. Why does God receive the glory in the redemption of man?
11. What are the six acts of God in verses 1-6?

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

To Know: The Holy Spirit desires for us to know the death of Christ secured for God a people who are saved from sin.

To Choose: The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose to accept the death of Christ in behalf of His people.

To Feel: The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of having been saved.

In any letter the opening paragraph will set the tone for the entire epistle. Galatians is no exception. The tone Paul establishes is that salvation and sanctification are by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the eternal glory of God alone.

Without spending an enormous amount of time on background material we will assume certain ideas.

- First, Paul is the author of the letter.
- Second, “throughout the book Paul assumes the position of the founder of the churches” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two – The Pauline Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1954], 71).
- Third, he wrote just after his first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. Galatians was written between Acts 14:26 and 15:1.
- Fourth, this is the first of Paul’s epistles written in approximately 46-48 AD. Some would argue that the letters to the Thessalonians is first. I, however, along with others see Galatians as first.
- Fifth, the audience to whom Paul wrote is in Southern Galatia and is a mixed group of people both spiritually and ethnically. “The Galatian churches were composed predominately of converts from among the Gentiles.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two – The Pauline Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1954], 72).
- Sixth, “The Galatians were known nationally as an impulsive, changeable, and inconsistent people. This can be seen in their paradoxical desire to worship Paul at one moment and to stone him the next (Acts 14:11-19) and also in their quickness to receive the gospel and to abandon it (1:6).” (Gromacki, *New Testament Survey*, 228).
- Seventh, what Paul writes in seed form is expanded on in the book of Romans.
- Eighth, Galatians contains for us the very essence of the Christian life. As such it should be the first truths taught to every new believer.

THE BIG PICTURE:

In considering the book of Galatians we can note a three-fold division.

- Chapters 1-2 = Personal/Biographical/ Authorization/Vindication (1:1, 2)
- Chapters 3-4 = Doctrinal/Biblical/Presentation/Exposition (1:3, 4a)
- Chapters 5-6 = Practical/Behavioral/ Application (1:4b, 5)

Almost without exception the epistles of the New Testament are circumstantial or occasional letters. There is a problem being addressed. Galatians is no different. There are two big ideas present in the opening paragraph. The first idea states Paul’s apostleship. The second idea sets forth the letter’s theme.

The Problem:

“The Epistle to the Galatians was called forth by the startling report to Paul that a sudden and drastic change of attitude toward him and his Gospel had taken place among the Galatians. The reason for this sudden change on the part of the Galatians was the intrusion of an alien propaganda into their midst.” (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two – The Pauline Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1954], 80, 81).

Think about what Paul said to the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:17-38 about the “savage wolves who will seek to draw away the disciples after them (vv. 29, 30).”

Outline:

I. The Apostleship of Paul (1:1-2)

- A. His apostleship - "Apostle" = sent one [from God] - not one of the 12 - Acts 1:21-26.

"The genitive 'of Christ Jesus' found elsewhere is missing here. Instead the title is supplemented, no doubt purposefully, by a carefully composed definition of the concept of apostle. The definition itself is composed of a negative and a positive part. The negative part denies twice that Paul's apostleship is human in origin and nature." (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 38).

1. Negatively stated – "Not from nor through men"
2. Positively stated – "But through"

"The relationship between Christ and God is defined by a Christological formula stating that God raised Christ from the dead." (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 39).

Paul immediately seeks to establish his divine authority and thus the credibility of his message. Why does Paul immediately establish his apostleship? Paul immediately establishes his apostleship because those who would undermine his message must discredit the man. In order to convert them away from the gospel they had to shake their confidence in Paul's authority via apostleship and personal integrity. Friend, this has not changed. In your stand for the truth, expect to be personally attacked. Such an assault on your person is wrong and bitter. Truth is truth regardless as to the messenger. Yet it is easier for the enemy to silence you than to silence the voice of God.

The two prepositions used by the apostle seek to separate his apostleship from human origin. Paul uses the strongest language to distance his apostleship from mere human authority and align himself with God. There is a strong contrastive conjunction used to put the two against each other. Not man BUT God. One does not chose the office of apostle. He is appointed to the office by the Godhead.

What Paul is about to say is based on the source of his ministry. The grammatical structure is such that there can be no doubt his apostleship came from God.

- B. His alliances - "All the brethren" = Possibly the church at Antioch w/Barnabas (Acts 15:35). Paul was not alone in his opposition to the Galatian heresy.

“The emphatic ‘all’ is unique in Paul and indicates that he wanted to write as the spokesman of a group which is solidly behind him and the letter.” (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 40).

Not only does he note the source of his authority, but he also notes that he is not alone in what he writes. When attacked the opponent of truth will seek to isolate and conquer. They will seek to make you and others believe that what you are holding to is unique and no one else believes it. Thus Paul cites, “All the brethren.”

Paul’s thoughts, as they are expressed in the following letter, are representative of a group of believers. Paul is not singular in his opposition to the heresy in Galatia.

Why does Paul do this? He understands that in order to convert the believer away from the gospel his opponents had to shake their confidence in Paul’s authority. If they can discredit Paul, then the message he brings will be undermined.

II. The Theme of the Epistle (1:3-5)

What does he promise?

A. The promise of grace and peace to the believing ones (1:3)

“The salutation is a form of prayer. Here it implicitly expresses Paul’s wish that the Galatians remain partakers of God’s redemption in Christ (1:4).” (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 40).

The promise of God is found in the extending of grace for the receiving of peace.

1. "Grace" = "God's unconditional good will towards humanity which is decisively expressed in the saving work of Christ." (F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, 74).
2. "Peace" = "the state of life enjoyed by those who have effectively experienced the divine grace." (F.F. Bruce, *Galatians*, 74).

Grace is found seven times in Galatians. It is a short book so let us take a look at its occurrences.

- a. Grace originates in the Godhead (1:3; 6:18).
- b. Grace is identified as being in the gospel (1:6; 2:21).
- c. Grace called Paul to salvation (1:15).
- d. Paul’s ministry was one of grace (2:9).
- e. Works and grace are mutually exclusively (5:4).

There must first be the receiving of grace (salvation) before there can be peace. The phrase is used 17 times in the New Testament. Paul uses it to

open up all of His epistles. Peter likewise uses it (1 Pt. 1:2; 2 Pt. 1:2) and as well as John (2 John 3; Rev. 1:4). It is by God's grace that we have the provision for sin's redemption. A benefit of having one's sins forgiven is the peace of God. The order is meticulously selected in that only the grace of God can produce the peace of God. Without grace, peace will forever elude the seeker.

How can the apostle make such a promise? Verse four gives us the theme and sets the stage for what is to follow. The grace and peace of God is made possible because of verse four. Grace is unconditional. There is nothing I can do to merit it. It is "freely given." It is **God's Riches At Christ's Expense**. Although for us grace is free, it is not without its cost. Verse four gives us the cost of grace and peace. "The compromise of grace always leads to the forfeiture of peace." (Wilson, *Galatians*, 15).

- B. The provision and purpose of Christ's death (1:4a [He gave Himself for the sake of our sins])

Notice the celebrated tone taken by Paul as He looks at the person and work of Jesus Christ. His opponents, those who would rob the cross of its glory, "professed to accept Christ, yet in theory and practice they tended to minimize and neutralize Him. They robbed Christ of His uniqueness by putting other things on a level with Him as necessary to salvation." (D. Edmond Hiebert, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Volume Two – The Pauline Epistles* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1954], 81).

"The Cross is thus God's answer to man's sin; the Death of Christ is at once the irrefragable proof of God's love to men. Plainly, then, the Cross stands in solitary isolation from aught that men can do. **The sufficiency of the Cross is its glory.** To add anything to it, however innocent or however laudable in itself, is to rob the Cross of that glory, and to do despite to the grace of God revealed in it." (C.F. Hogg and W.E. Vine, *The Epistle to the Galatians: with Notes Exegetical and Expository* [Reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1959], vii).

He gave Himself in behalf of our sins (1 Cor. 15:3; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:25; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14; 1 John 2:2; 4:10).

1. The doctrine of substitution

He took that which rightly belonged to us. He stood in our place. He did that which we could not do. He did not have to do what He did, but He did what He did not have to do. This is called grace. "The magnitude of the sacrifice which our sins called forth manifests the supreme folly of looking elsewhere for their forgiveness." (Wilson, *Galatians*, 15).

"'Christ gave himself up for our sins' implies an old Christology which understood Jesus' death as an expiatory self-sacrifice." (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia – A

Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 41).

2. The doctrine of satisfaction

Christ had to die for our sins. Sin's guilt and debt demanded that the God/man die. The sufficiency of Christ swallows up the inability of man.

3. The doctrine of sanctification (1:4c [in order that we might be delivered])

“The conjunction ‘in order that’ refers to the present reality of salvation.” (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 43).

Christ died in order that we might be delivered from this present evil age. The gospel always takes us out of one realm and places us into another. Paul notes this same truth in Colossians 1:13. John made much of this truth (John 17:11, 15, 16 [in the world, but not of the world]; 1 John 2:15-17 [love not the world]).

The epistle is a challenge to those who are trying to go back to what they have been saved from. The gospel saves us from this present evil age, an age that is man-centered and law dependent for acceptance and gain. It is a system and world that seeks autonomy and independence from God. It does not rest in His finished work. Paul's shock in verse six is because they are trying to crawl back into the hole from which they have been delivered.

Luther warned the church with this exhortation. “We have to fear as the greatest and nearest danger, lest Satan take from us the pure doctrine of faith, and bring into the Church again the doctrine of works and men's traditions. Wherefore it is very necessary, that this doctrine be kept in continual practice and public exercise both of reading and hearing. Wherefore this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough. If this doctrine be lost, then is also the whole knowledge of truth, life and salvation lost and gone.” (Luther, Galatians, 21).

The product of the saved life is a transformed life. You are no longer the same person you were prior to your encounter with Christ.

C. The immutable plan of God (1:4d [according to God's will])

“It underscores that the salvation through Christ did not occur apart from, but in complete harmony with the will of God.” (Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 43).

It was in the plan of God that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world. In fact apart from Him coming and then dying mankind could never have paid the debt created against an infinite God.

Why has God gone to such measures to secure for us salvation?

D. The eternal praising of God (1:5 [to whom be glory forever and ever])

“This addition of a doxology to the end of the introductory salutation is unparalleled in Paul’s letters. It may have been prompted here by the gospel summary.” (Bruce, *Galatians*, 77)

SHEPHERDING THE PEOPLE: (What is the NEXT STEP?)

“Paul wrote to the Galatians that they might not be cheated of the freedom which was theirs by right. The truth he expounded so vigorously and so ably is still of the utmost value to those who think of the Christian life as a succession of inhibitions rather than as a continual expression of divine victories.” (Tenney, *Galatians*, 18, 19).

“There is a tendency in human nature to forget this. Christian writers and teachers have been prone to make much of the ability to perform good works which have in themselves the power of rendering us acceptable to God. It is true indeed that such writers avoided Jewish terms, but many taught doctrine that gave nearly as much weight to works as did that of the Jews themselves.” (Williams, *Cambridge . . . Galatians*, xl).

“Galatians is a dangerous book. It exposes the most popular substitute for spiritual living that we have in our churches today – legalism. I didn’t say ‘among the false cults.’ I said ‘in the churches’ because that is where much legalism is today. Millions of believers think they are ‘spiritual’ because of what they don’t do – or because of the leader they follow – or because of the group they belong to. After spending months studying Galatians, I am humbled and challenged. Humbled because I don’t think God is too impressed with our ministries, no matter how impressed men may be. Challenged because I myself need to start living deeper and ministering deeper. I need to dare to let the Holy Spirit have His way, whether my life or ministry fits the current pattern or not.” (Warren Wiersbe, *Galatians*, 7).

“Paul would have [us] know that his gospel – the free justification of the sinner through Christ crucified – means nothing to those who whom it does not mean everything.” (Wilson, *Galatians*, 16).

1. God loves you unconditionally. It is because He loves you, that you love Him and others (1 John 4:10, 11).
2. Pray for a deep and rich understanding of God's Word. Pray for the transfer that must take place between the hearing and holding fast to the Word for grace and peace (Heb. 4:2).
3. Pray for the message of grace as it reaches into every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (Rev. 5:9).