

Freedom in Christ, Part 2

Scripture: Galatians 1:1–5

Code: 48-3

As you know, we are looking at the book of Galatians, and very, very thankful to be coming to this wonderful book. You can open your Bible to the book of Galatians, if you will. We're still just working our way through the introduction, the opening five verses. That's very important, as Paul sets things down as a foundation for what he has to say. But just a bigger picture for a moment might help you.

The apostles and their associates were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write the New Testament. In the upper room on that Thursday night, Jesus said to His disciples, "The Holy Spirit is going to come. He's going to bring all things to your remembrance, and He's going to lead you into all truth." This was not just a general promise to all believers, this was a specific promise to the apostles and their associates, that the Holy Spirit would superintend them recording the gospels, and writing down the New Testament.

The promise of our Lord that the New Testament would be given to them by the Holy Spirit was affirmed by the apostles themselves. The apostle Paul said, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It's all God-breathed." And the apostle Peter said that, "We do not follow human instruction, but holy men were moved by the Holy Spirit. And that is how the Scripture is recorded." The New Testament throughout claims to be the divine revelation, the word from God in every single word, and therefore, every thought.

Paul wrote thirteen of those New Testament books. The earliest of the New Testament books is the book of James, written by James, and that early book is a very foundational book. It talks about the fact that salvation must be manifest in a changed life. Faith without – what? – works is dead. Wherever there is a real, saving faith, it'll show up in a transformed life, and manifest itself in righteous works.

James establishes the fact that works is not the cause of justification, it is the fruit of justification. It is the evidence of it. But it is a necessary evidence and demonstration of a new creation. Very important to establish that at the very beginning of the New Testament. James is probably the earliest book written, written somewhere around maybe the year 48, or 49. We must understand that salvation will produce righteous works by the transformation of the life in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The second book written through the twenty-seven books of the New Testament is the book of Galatians, and therefore obviously the first book written by Paul. What Galatians wants to tell us is this, sort of the opposite of James. James wants us to know that were real salvation occurs, works will follow. Paul tells us in Galatians that works do not, do not provide any element of salvation. They are not the source. They are not the cause. Salvation is a work of grace alone through faith alone, apart from works.

Galatians is the defense of the central New Testament doctrine of justification by faith alone. This defense of the true gospel was necessitated early in the New Testament era, early in the first century, probably written just around the times James was written, maybe 49 or 50 of that first century. And the reason it is written is because already there are people saying that salvation is by grace, but not grace alone; justification is by faith, but not by faith alone; there must be works.

And this comes early on. And there are false teachers taking this heretical teaching around to the newly-founded churches. In fact, they dogged the steps of the apostle Paul; and wherever he would plant churches, they would show up with their gospel of faith and works. So what you have in the book of Galatians is the earliest polemical defense of justification by faith alone apart from works. This is what Paul had always taught.

Now, Galatians is a very fast-paced, brief book, just six chapters. About five or six years later after Galatians, Paul wrote Romans; and in writing Romans, Paul also defended the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone apart from works. So there are close parallels between the book of Galatians and the book of Romans. Galatians is the condensed form of it, and it comes out early before Paul goes through the lengthy treatments of these same issues in Romans.

It comes out early, because it is so necessary. The battle is on. The war has begun against the true gospel. In fact, in verse 6, Paul is shocked, and says this, chapter 1: "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is not another gospel; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."

The battle was on from the very earliest time. There were false teachers who claimed to be believers in Christ. They came from Jerusalem. They were Jewish. They had come to accept, to one degree or another, that Jesus was the Messiah. They professed Christ, they professed to be Christians, and this gave them access to the church. And so they took their testimony concerning Christ and added to it the fact that if you were going to be saved, Christ you needed, but Christ was not all you needed. You also needed to be circumcised as prescribed in the Mosaic law, and then you needed to continue to maintain the Mosaic ceremonies and rituals, the external elements of the law. They were called Judaizers.

Now, imagine this: they're dogging the steps of Paul in Gentile cities, trying to impose Old Testament Jewish covenantal elements on Gentiles who know nothing about Judaism and know nothing about the Old Testament, telling them that they need to be circumcised as adults, and then they need to introduce into their lives all the ceremonies and rituals of the Old Covenant, or they cannot be saved. Paul launches into the polemic against the Judaizers in the book of Galatians, and comes back a few years later, as I said, in the book of Romans.

Now, there was never a question about Paul's teaching. Several passages are helpful to make sure we understand that. Turn to Romans 4:5. I'm just going to give you some rather clear and condensed statements about this issue. Romans 4:5, Paul writes this: "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." That is a monumental summary of the gospel.

"But to the one who does not work, there is not human work, there is no external action, whether it is

circumcision, or whether it is some ceremony or some ritual or some moral behavior, there is no work that contributes to salvation. Rather, salvation comes to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly.”

The Judaizers assumed that God justified the godly, so that if you were “godly” by following the prescription to be circumcised, and following the prescription to carry out the ceremonies and the rituals, and following some moral oughts from the Old Testament, if you qualified by your works, then the grace of God would be extended to you. That basically continues to exist today in false forms of Christianity, including Roman Catholicism.

But Paul says, “To the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” In other words, an ungodly person by faith is credited by God as if he is completely righteous. That’s the true gospel. That is the true gospel.

Paul came to understand that gospel, and saw any attack on that gospel, any effort to Judaize people – or for that matter any other kind of work – but in particular, for any effort to Judaize people and say, “You have to be circumcised, you have to keep Mosaic ceremonies, you have to follow the Mosaic law,” he saw any of that as an attack on the gospel, and so stripping the gospel that one could not truly be saved by that false gospel. That’s why in chapter 1, verse 6 to 9, he says, “If anybody preaches that stuff, let him be damned, *anathema*!” *Anathema* is the word that he uses. “Let him be accursed!”

So Paul comes out fighting early on in the apostolic time of Revelation in the book of Galatians. And to show you how he feels about these false teachers trying to Judaize the Gentiles, you need only look at Philippians chapter 3 for just a moment. Philippians chapter 3, verse 1: “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it’s a safeguard for you.” Always trying to protect, always trying to repeat what he said when he was in these places, founding these churches, and stayed and taught them the true gospel. You remember how the story goes; as soon as he would leave, there would be some kind of disruption. He would write a letter back, saying, “Let me tell you again,” in order to protect the truth, to safeguard the truth.

Any faithful preacher, like any faithful apostle, is both a proclaimer of truth and a protector of truth, both one who evangelizes and one who guards. We are going forward in an aggressive way on the offense to take the gospel to the world. At the same time, we are playing defense, earnestly contending for the faith delivered once for all to the saints. We are both offensive in our proclamation, and defensive in our guarding of the truth.

So Paul wanted to guard the truth, and he did it by proclaiming the truth, and the Spirit of God used him to write the truth eventually in his thirteen epistles. This is the truth, and it is clearly revealed there. He also did it by acknowledging the existence of false teachers, and labeling them in such dramatic fashion that people would see how terrifying they were, and how deadly their influence. And that’s what he does in Philippians 3.

Look at what he says, verse 2: “Beware of the dogs.” That’s the worst thing you could say about somebody. Our world today is different; dogs have been elevated in our world. So ridiculous. They’re the new children. But in the ancient world, if somebody called you a dog, that would be tantamount to somebody calling you a rat. Dogs were feral animals that ate in the garbage dumps of the ancient

world. To call somebody a dog is the worst you could possibly call them.

Who is he talking about? Well, he says, “Beware of the dogs. Beware of the evil workers.” Who are you talking about? “Beware of the false circumcision,” the Judaizers who were going around telling you that grace and faith is not enough, you need works. You need to be circumcised. You need to keep the prescriptions of Mosaic ceremony. These are evil workers, beware of them. “For we, as believers, are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God, glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh,” in any fleshly act, any fleshly behavior.

Paul says, “I might have confidence. If anyone does, I might have confidence in the flesh. I was circumcised the eighth day of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;” – the most fastidious attention was given to the law by Pharisees – “as to zeal, how zealous was I for the law, I persecuted the church. As to the righteousness which is found in the law, I was found blameless.” This is a legalist of the highest level.

“Those things were gain to me, of course, until I met Christ. And those things that I thought were gain to me, I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish that I may gain Christ. All that legalism, all that circumcision ceremony, all of it is rubbish, garbage. I have been found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ,” – there it is, faith alone, not the law – “a righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.” So he goes after the Judaizers even in the epistle of the Philippians, which tends to be one of the most amiable of all his letters. This is a standard pattern for Paul in his defense of the true gospel to expose those teaching the false gospels.

In Titus chapter 1, this is the next to the last book in his life. He writes in verse 10, “There are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach for the sake of sordid gain.” They’re in it for the money. And down in verse 16, “They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.”

Detestable, disobedient, worthless are these rebellious empty talkers, deceivers of the circumcision who must be silenced. Anybody who came along and added anything to salvation by grace alone through faith alone was a threat. And so Paul’s ministry, while on the one hand is teaching the gospel of Christ, on the other side is warning and assaulting false doctrine.

He told the Ephesian elders in Acts 20 that for three years, night and day, he had warned them of false teaching – false teachers that would rise up in their midst, and others that would come from the outside. So Galatians is Paul’s first book. It is also a polemic against false gospels that really is as severe as any book that he wrote, because he has to attack error, he has to defend truth.

Now, I hadn’t really planned to say all that, so now let’s look at Galatians chapter 1. But I did. Let’s read the text.

“Paul, 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 dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.”

That is his introduction. And as I told you a couple of weeks ago, this is the only letter of the thirteen that he wrote in which there is no commendation of the Galatians. I’m sure there were things that could have been said commendably about them. There must have been some faithful people.

Paul always did that, but not here. And the reason is, he is in one mad rush to attack this error. He goes right from that to verse 6, “I am amazed that you’re so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel. It’s not really another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” He can’t believe that having gone there, planted the church on his first missionary journey, gone back on his second and gone back on his third, that they have so easily shifted into listening to these false teachers; and the gospel is at stake.

Look, if the gospel is at stake, salvation is at stake, because apart from the true gospel there’s no true salvation. So naturally, the enemy Satan and his demons and all his emissaries in human form will always assault the gospel. False gospels abound; they did then, they do now. They’re all in one form or another, a message that says your salvation in some ways depends on you. You have to do these works, go through these ceremonies, these rituals, these sacraments, join this church or that church, be a part of this organization or that cult or whatever it is. All of the false gospels import works. Now, what was going on in Galatia had a great affect on the people, a disastrous affect on them.

In chapter 4 of Galatians, I just remind you of this, in verse 17, Paul says, “They eagerly seek you,” – they want you, they want you for what? – “not commendably,” – not for any good purpose – “but they wish to shut you out” – shut you out of the kingdom of heaven – “so that you will seek them.” “And they are” – in verse 16 – “they are painting me” – Paul says – “as if I am your enemy and they are your friends.” This is what false teachers do.

In chapter 5, verse 10, he says, “I have confidence in you in the Lord that you will adopt no other view; but the one who is disturbing you will bear his judgment, whoever he is.” And then this amazing statement in verse 12: “I wish that those who are troubling you would even mutilate themselves.” This is an unbelievable statement. “Those who are telling you you need circumcision, I wish they’d castrate themselves.” Fierce denunciation of false teachers.

In chapter 6, verse 12, “Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.” This will make them able to remain in their Jewish communities. And then, secondly, in verse 12, they don’t want to be persecuted by the Jews, so they add law to grace. Verse 13: “They desire to have you circumcised so they may boast in your flesh.” They want to count you as a convert, part of their success.

So here come these Judaizers. They came from Jerusalem. They profess to believe in Christ. They profess to be Christians, to have some connection to the Jerusalem church. And they’re coming into these churches that had been planted by Paul, churches full of Gentiles, and telling them they need

to go through circumcision and to submit to Mosaic ceremonies. Paul knows this is deadly stuff, because it corrupts the purity of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

Now, in order for Paul to make a significant impact in his defense, he has to first defend his own authority, which he does in the opening two chapters. Takes two chapters to defend his own authority. Now, keep in mind, there's no New Testament yet, so there's no book that you can go to to measure the teachers. So if somebody's coming along and preaching and teaching, how do you know if it's true or not? If you don't have what we have in the New Testament, if you don't have the apostles' doctrine inspired and written down, then all you have is the apostles. Their authority is critical.

So what the false teachers would do would be to, first, denounce the message, and then denounce the apostle who was the authority. So Paul then has to defend the integrity. He has to defend the legitimacy of his apostleship. And that's what he does in the opening two chapter. Well, let's look then at the very beginning, those five verses.

Paul wants to establish here just three things: his authority, his message, and his motive; his authority, his message, and his motive. His authority comes in verses 1 and 2: Paul, 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 dead), and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia."

How does Paul defend his authority? Well, first, he gives his name, just his name. And then immediately, his first defense is bound up in his title: "Paul, an apostle." He doesn't define that, he doesn't defend that, he doesn't describe it, because the churches knew what an apostle was, and they knew he was an apostle.

Drop down to chapter 1, verse 14. Here's a little bit of his testimony. Verse 13, he says his former manner of life was in Judaism. He persecuted the church of God beyond measure, tried to destroy it. He says, "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions." That's him, a Pharisee, and the most extreme level of attention to the law.

"But when God, who had set me apart, even from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood, nor did I go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I went to Arabia, and returned after that to Damascus. Only three years later did I go to Jerusalem."

Paul is an apostle, but he is not an apostle who received the revelation of the gospel second-hand from other apostles. No. He was chosen by God. He was called by God. He was justified and converted by God on the Damascus Road. And then he was taught by God in the desert the gospel through direct revelation. He is an apostle. They would call this into question as a way to discredit what he taught.

What is an apostle? What is an apostle? The word means a messenger, a messenger. It's simply a basic word that means a messenger. But Paul uses it often to identify himself, because to the readers of the New Testament it had more meaning than just a lowercase messenger. He uses it in 1

and 2 Corinthians, Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, here.

The word essentially means an envoy. You could translate it delegate. You could translate it ambassador or messenger. Very familiar term, by the way, to the Jewish people as well as to the Gentiles. It referred to some special emissary who is sent out from some monarch or some official government as a representative with legal authority to act on behalf of the king, or on behalf of that government.

We understand that in the world in which we live, that we have as a nation ambassadors who are sent around the world to be representatives of the American government, the American people who are called upon to act in concert with those who commissioned them, and declare to the nations where they now live the will and desire of America. That's what ambassadors and emissaries do.

Jesus chose twelve such apostles, and only twelve. They're listed in Matthew 10 by name. "He called His disciples," – Luke 6:13 says – "and chose from them twelve, and he named them apostles, He named them apostles." There were twelve of them who were apostles, and they operated with a delegate authority.

For example, Peter in Acts chapter 3 heals the lame man. And what does he say? "In the name of Jesus the Nazarene, walk." It's not in his own name, he is a representative of the one who commissioned him and empowered him.

There were twelve apostles. One committed suicide: an unbelieving, apostate betrayer by the name of Judas. His place was taken by a man named Matthias – and the record of that is in Acts 1 – and then there are twelve again. And then there was one later added, and namely that is the apostle Paul.

He was not worthy to be an apostle because he was a blasphemer. He received his apostleship, he said, "By grace I am what I am. But I am no lesser apostle. I am not, in any sense, less than the rest of the apostles in commission and authority and revelation."

Unworthy, yes, because he was a persecutor. But he was a true apostle. There are only twelve. There's no such thing as apostolic succession, there were only twelve apostles, chosen personally by Jesus Christ, having to see Him alive after His resurrection. Now, people questioned Paul about that. But he saw Him alive after the resurrection on the Damascus Road.

The testimony that an apostle would give was firsthand eyewitness. Listen to John give his testimony as an apostle. "What was from the beginning" – he's referring to Christ – "what we've heard, what we've seen with our eyes, what we've looked at, touched with our hands concerning the Word of Life – and we've seen and testify and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father, was manifested to us – what we have seen and heard, we proclaim to you also."

That's an apostle: seen and heard, experienced the living Christ, been with Christ, seen Him risen from the dead. That's an apostle. There were twelve, minus one, plus Matthias, and then Paul. They are the foundation of the church.

Ephesians 2:20, "the foundation of the apostles," is clearly indicated there. The mysteries of the New

Testament, the mystery of the church comes through the holy apostles. There is no such thing as apostolic succession. The New Testament is the apostles' doctrine written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

Acts 2:42, the early church studied the apostle's doctrine. The last time the apostles ever met together is recorded in the 15th chapter of Acts, the Jerusalem Council. After that they disappear from the written historical record. They're gone, with the exception of Paul, who makes it all the way to the end of the book of Acts. Leadership then is turned over to evangelists, and teaching pastors, and some preachers in the church. There were only twelve, plus one apostles.

You would think today, if you listen to the charismatic movement that there were hundreds of apostles running around the world, if not thousands of apostles. People take the title "apostle." There were only twelve. Maybe they're messengers in that sense. But to take that word is to confound the uniqueness of the apostolic calling that our Lord gave to just thirteen men through whom He, and with their companions, wrote down the New Testament. They would have understood that in Galatia, because Paul would have made that known to them.

He didn't have to defend it, he just needed to say, "I am an apostle. I am an apostle, and my apostleship does not come from men or through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead." So he moves from his title – in defending his legitimacy – from his title to his commission. He accredits himself by the fact that he was chosen, not from men, not through men, but from God through Christ, from God who raised Christ from the dead.

Obviously the false teachers were saying, "He has no authority. He's not legitimate. Don't believe his message, because he's not a real apostle." That is just not true.

The circumcision people dogged his steps so much that they became a movement on their own. Chapter 2, verse 12, calls them the party of the circumcision. They were like a religious party. Paul takes them on head on, because they were not only attacking his message, but attacking his authority. "My authority does not come from men, does not come through the agency of man, it comes through Jesus Christ."

You say, "Well, is Jesus Christ valid? Is Jesus Christ a true representative of God? Can Jesus Christ – does He have the authority, does He have the power to appoint apostles?" The answer is, of course He does, because God the Father raised Him from the dead. And in God raising Christ, God is affirming Christ. He is declaring Him to be His Son and Lord. The resurrection are God's credentials on Christ. The call to apostleship are Christ's credentials on the apostle.

And, by the way, the resurrection was God's validation of Christ. But there's something more there I would just point out to you in the scheme of this book, and it is this: the resurrection of Christ from the dead was the inauguration of the new age, the inauguration of the new covenant. The old ended with the final sacrifice, and the temple curtain was ripped from top to bottom, and that system was gone. There was no more priesthood. There were no more sacrifices. All Mosaic ritual was gone. No more Sabbaths, no more feast days, no more holy days – all gone. Even the last Passover in the upper room Jesus turned into a Communion service. The old age ends at the cross; the new age begins at the resurrection. And one of the things that you must understand is you don't go back to the old age after the resurrection.

Why would you bring up circumcision? Why would you bring up ceremonies and rituals and feast days and sabbaths, which are, as Paul says to the Colossians, a shadow of things to come? But Christ is the reality. We don't need any of those things. That is why you don't want to drag baptism in as some necessary right to make salvation possible, as many do today.

The new covenant is grace and faith. And when the apostles began to preach after the resurrection, go through the book of Acts – I was going to do that, I don't have time. You can see preaching in Acts 2, preaching in Acts 3, Acts 4, Acts 5, Acts 10, on into Acts 13, on into Acts 17. They're preaching the resurrection, the resurrection, the resurrection.

The new age has come, and they're preaching that in the new age God saves sinners, ungodly people, purely on the basis of faith. Christ is the Son of God. How do we know that? Because God raised Him from the dead. That was indication that God was satisfied with His sacrifice, He accomplished the redemption of His people, and that is the message we preach. The resurrection signals the beginning of the new age. Why would you go back to the old?

So Paul is an apostle with a commission that has come to him from Jesus Christ on the Damascus Road. You can read about it in Acts 9, the history is there. He has a commission from Jesus Christ, and if you question Christ, then go back one and say, "This is the true head of the church. He is the Lord of lords, because the Father declared Him such by raising Him from the dead." So his authority comes from his title as an apostle, and from his commission from the risen Christ.

Thirdly, his authority comes from his association, and this is important. Verse 2, "and all the brethren who are with me." Very important to note this. He doesn't say, "and all the other apostles who are with me." He knows better than that. All the other preachers with him, whether Barnabas or whoever else, they were brothers. He's an apostle; they are brothers. That is a term of distinction.

Paul, when referring to them, usually names them in his other letters. Here he doesn't name them, he just calls them "brother." In many of his letters he gives you names of some of the brothers that are with him. He's an apostle, and certain brothers are with him: Barnabas, or Silas, or Timothy, or Titus, or whoever. He's happy for the association with other preaching brothers, but they're not apostles.

And, oh, by the way, this indicates to us that the gospel is not idiosyncratic. It's not Paul and Paul alone. There are many other brothers who are preaching this same message. It's not something that he invented that no one else has heard. They preach the very same gospel, and their gospel didn't include circumcision, and their gospel didn't include works, except as a result, but certainly not as a cause of salvation. He is an apostle; they are brothers. He's not standing alone against the heresies in Galatia or anywhere else; other brothers stand with him on the true gospel. And for this he is sending this letter to the churches of Galatia. That tells you there were many churches in Galatia.

Galatia is not a town, it's a region. It's a region maybe 175 miles by 250 miles. It would be today in Southern Turkey. Galatia comes from the ancient term "Gaul." Have you ever heard of the Gallic Wars, Caesar Gallic Wars when you were in college? The Gauls are sometimes called the Celts or the Celts, where tribes of people that used to harass Rome 300 years before Christ, 400 years before Christ. They fought constant battles against the Romans. In the third century they joined

Hannibal to come down and try to destroy Roman power. They plundered Rome, they plundered Greece. But, eventually, they finally were defeated by the Romans, and the Romans were generous enough to let them exist.

Two hundred years before Christ, they settled down into Southern Asia Minor, which is now part of Turkey. Paul had gone there on his first journey, second and third missionary journey, planted these churches in Derbe, Iconium, and Lystra, and Antioch; and these were people who should have never questioned the gospel or his authority. But these are the subtleties of false teachers. They had come in and wreaked havoc with the truth and with his authority, and so here comes his answer to these churches. So that's the statement on his authority.

Now, let's look at verses 3 and 4 just quickly, because we'll more of this later. He defends his office based on his authority and based on his message, verses 3 and 4: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father." Here's a familiar salutation from which we drew the name of our radio ministry Grace To You obviously. He uses it in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, and here. Again, there's no commendation, but there is a statement of, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Grace and peace need to be understood this way. Basically, grace is the source of salvation; peace is the result of it. Grace is the source of salvation; peace is the result of it. Let me say it another way. Grace is the sum of all blessings bestowed by God; peace is the enjoyment of all blessings experienced by the believer. Okay? Grace is the sum of all blessings provided by God; peace is the enjoyment of all blessings provided by God and experienced by the believer.

We are saved by grace into peace. We have a peace that passes understanding. We have peace with God. We don't fear death. We don't fear what the world brings. We have no fear of the enemy. We have no fear of Satan. We have no fear of demons. We have no fear of whatever happens in life, because we are at peace with God, our eternity is settled, and we're eager to be in His presence. That is the profound peace that grace brings.

So this is the best of all possible greetings: "Grace to you and peace" – and notice it's – "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," – both. And further in verse 4, here's where the grace comes from, and the peace, because the Lord Jesus Christ – "gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father."

Now, just a couple of things to think about. Here is the nature of Christ's death. What happened when He died? Did He die the death of a martyr? Did He die the death of a well-intentioned, religious leader who suffered the bad ending to an otherwise noble life? Is this the death of a hero? No. He is saying clearly, Paul is, that He gave Himself for our sins. In other words, He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. That's what He anticipated in the garden, that's what the Lord knew was coming, Paul says that's exactly what happened.

The death of Christ is not some kind of act of love and leave it at that. It is not the death of a hero. It is an actual sacrifice for sin. He is the one Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world – sacrifice for sin. Circumcision adds nothing. Ceremony adds nothing. Ritual adds nothing. Morality adds nothing.

In the 20th verse of the 2nd chapter, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” That’s what happens: Christ dies; and by a divine miracle, we die in Him; our sins are paid for; then He comes to live in us. Circumcision has nothing to do with that. Baptism has nothing to do with that. Christ’s death is a sin offering to God, a ransom paid to God to rescue sinners, and to provide the forgiveness of their sins. It is a full atonement. That’s the nature of the sacrifice. The affect of it is to rescue us from this present evil age. Please mark this. It’s not a potential rescue, it’s an actual one.

“He gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age.” That’s what He did. When He died, He actually delivered, or rescued, *exaireó*; the same word used in the Septuagint for the exodus from Egypt. “He rescued us from this present evil age.” Another way to say it, I read in Colossians 1: “He rescued us from the domain of darkness.” The domain of darkness, this present evil age – the same thing, the realm over which Satan rules. The gospel is a rescue, and the death of Christ provided the rescue. It is an actual atoning sacrifice for the sins of God’s people that rescues them from the domain of darkness from this present evil age. It’s a rescue operation.

What was behind this? What caused it? Back to verse 4: “According to the will of our God and Father.” God willed the death of Christ. “It was by” – Peter said on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2 – “the determinant plan and will of God.” He repeats the same thing in Acts, chapter 4: “God willed to send His Son to be an actual atoning sacrifice for sinners so that they would be rescued from this present evil age.”

That’s the gospel. It is by the will of God, all planned by God and executed by Christ. There is no room in this for circumcision, for ritual of any kind. The message is again the clear gospel. Through the death of Christ, the people of God are rescued from this present evil age, which of course is coming to a horrible end, this according to the will of our God and Father.

So the authority: he defends the message he declares. And, finally, the motive. Verse 5, “to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen. All of this to the glory of God. Put works in. Put any physical action in, any accomplishment, any achievement, any morality, any ritual, any ceremony, any sacrament, and God does not get all the glory. All the glory, all the glory belongs to Him; it is His work and His alone.

First Corinthians 1, verse 29 says, “No man may boast before God. By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

This is the issue at stake. “To Him be the glory forever and ever.” And this is repeated throughout Paul’s letters. He says it in Ephesians. He says it in Philippians. He says it in 2 Timothy, he says it here: by insisting on human works, by insisting on circumcision and human effort of any kind, they were degrading what God had done in Christ. It was incomplete. But by denouncing that, Paul is point to the absolute, all-sufficiency of Christ and His perfect work, and therefore magnifying God, and giving Him all the glory.

A rich benediction comes to us out of this passage. Did you notice, at every stage in what Paul has said the Father and the Son are together? The sin-bearing of Jesus was both an act of self-sacrifice and an act of the will of God the Father. The authority of Paul as an apostle was through God the

Father and Jesus Christ.

The grace and peace which we receive are from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Together they planned it. Together they provided it. Together they announced it. Together they bestow it. It's why our Lord says in John 5:23, "He that honors not the Son honors not the Father who sent Him." Don't tamper with the gospel. That's Paul's heart cry.

Father, we again thank You that we've been able to gather this morning under heaven, and hear from heaven. We have truly heard from heaven, we have heard You speak. What we have sung, what we have prayed, what we have read, and what we have taught all comes from heaven. It's all heaven's truth. We have experienced heaven coming down; You have spoken. What a powerful, blessed, amazing experience this is. And You have granted us more wisdom, more understanding, more knowledge of Yourself by which we can render You more glory and more gratitude.

Lord, I pray that You would be gracious to sinners here for whom Your Son died, and draw them to Yourself now. Any who have rejected Christ, rejected the gospel are still in this present evil age, still bound in the kingdom of darkness. Lord, would You release them today to the light of Christ? That's our prayer. Amen.

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