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The Salutation (1:1-5)

1

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, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.

(1:1-5)

One way to deny the truthfulness of a message is to deny the authority of the one who gives it. The Galatian church had received the true gospel of grace from Paul and had believed it until some false teachers came in after he was gone. They not only attacked the validity of the message but also that of the messenger. Apparently the Judaizers had convinced some of the Galatian church members that Paul was a self-appointed apostle with no divine commission. So at the outset of the letter Paul dispensed with the usual personal greetings and immediately began to establish the genuineness of his apostolic authority, which he later (1:11–2:21) expands on in detail.

In this brief salutation Paul summarizes his authority (his right to speak), his message (the truths he speaks), and his motive (his reason for speaking).

PAUL'S AUTHORITY

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: (1:1-2)

Following the custom of his times, the apostle begins his letter by stating his name, **Paul**. He then establishes his authority as an apostle, first on the basis of his right to the title "apostle," second on the basis of the manner in which he was chosen for that office, and third on the basis of his relationship to fellow believers.

THE TITLE APOSTLE

an apostle (1:1a)

An **apostle** ("one who is sent with a commission") was an envoy, ambassador, or messenger who was chosen and trained by Jesus Christ as His special emissary for proclaiming His truth during the formative years of the church. In its primary and technical usage, the term applied to the original twelve who were chosen at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry (Mark 3:14; Luke 6:13) and were set aside to lay the foundation of the early church and to be the channels of God's completed revelation (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20). They were also given power to perform healings and to cast out demons as verifying signs of their divine authority (Acts 2:43; 2 Cor. 12:12; Heb. 2:3-4). It should be noted that, shortly before Pentecost, Judas was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:26).

In a wider sense, the term apostle is also used of men like Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Silas and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1; 2:6), and other outstanding leaders (Rom. 16:7). Such men are more specifically called messengers (*apostoloi*) of the churches (see 2 Cor. 8:23; Phil. 2:25), whereas the Twelve and Paul were "apostles of Jesus Christ." Neither group was perpetuated. Except for Judas, there is no New Testament record of an apostle in either the primary or secondary group being replaced after he died.

Because he was not among the original twelve, Paul needed to defend his apostleship in ways that they did not. Because one of the qualifications was witnessing the risen Christ (Acts 1:22), Paul explained to the Corinthian church that between His resurrection and ascension Jesus first "appeared to Cephas [Peter], then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time; . . . then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as it were to one untimely born, He appeared to me also" (1 Cor. 15:5-8). Paul witnessed the resurrected Christ in a unique way. As he was traveling to Damascus to arrest and imprison Christians there, "suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?' And he said, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said, 'I am Jesus whom you are persecuting'" (Acts 9:3-5). Through the godly Ananias of Damascus, the Lord declared this former enemy

of the gospel to be “a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel” (v. 15). Just as the Lord “effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised [He] effectually worked for [Paul] also to the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:8).

Further personal appearances of the Lord to Paul are recorded in Acts 18:9; 22:17-21; 23:11; and 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1).

THE MANNER IN WHICH HE WAS CHOSEN

(not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead), (1:1b)

Because false teachers were accusing Paul of being a spurious, self-appointed apostle who had no authority to teach and to rule the churches, he emphatically stated that his was no human commission, that he was **not sent from men**. He had not appointed himself and had not even been divinely appointed **through the agency of men**. No human means of any sort was involved in his apostolic commissioning. No human source, no human ceremony, no laying on of hands by any group in Jerusalem, Antioch, or anywhere else was involved in his call to apostleship, though the elders at Antioch were a part of the sending process of his special mission tour to evangelize (Acts 13:1-3).

Paul's original call to apostleship was directly **through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead**. Jesus called Paul and set him apart before he had contact with any of the other apostles. After several years of divine preparation (see Gal. 1:17-18), he was sent out to begin his work among the Gentiles directly by the Holy Spirit, whose divine appointment was acknowledged by the leaders of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:2-3). Paul's authority was not man-given or self-given but **God-given**, and his right to instruct the Galatians was grounded in that divine prerogative.

Paul never missed an opportunity to mention the resurrection, without which the gospel would be powerless. The God who appointed Paul an apostle was **God the Father, who raised His Son from the dead**.

Paul certainly had a vastly superior commissioning to any of the false-teaching, self-appointed Judaizers who were confusing the Galatians and trying to set themselves above his authority.

The apostle's frequent mention of **God** and **Father** in relation to **Jesus Christ** throughout the New Testament marks an emphasis that should not be missed. The intent is not for us to understand God as *our* Father (although that truth is mentioned in 1:4) but **the Father** in relation to the role He has in the Trinity, particularly His relation to the Son. The intent is to emphasize the significance of the relationship between the first and second members of the Trinity as to essential nature. The title is to express equality of deity between the two, a Father and Son who share the same nature (cf. Matt. 11:27; John 5:17-18, 22; 10:29-33; 14:9; 17:1-5; Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 1:3;

Eph. 1:3; 1 Pet. 1:3; 2 John 3). It asserts that **Jesus Christ** is the One who is of the nature of God and that the true God is the One who is **the Father of Jesus Christ**.

HIS ASSOCIATION

and all the brethren who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: (1:2)

A third basis of Paul's authority is implied by his referring to companions with him at the time of writing as **brethren**, in contrast to his own identification as apostle.

Liberal Bible scholars and theologians maintain that the apostles were no more significant or inspired than other human witnesses of Jesus Christ who happened to live at the same time He ministered on earth. What they taught and wrote was based on their own human insight and understanding and was not divinely authoritative or binding on other believers, either of their own day or of later ages. Every believer has his own experiences of what is often called "the Christ event."

Roman Catholic dogma maintains that the church wrote the Bible and is therefore a higher authority than the Bible. The church can therefore add to or modify Scripture as it sees fit, and its ecclesiastical pronouncements are held to have the same spiritual and moral authority as Scripture—even when they clearly contradict scriptural teaching.

Paul would have argued against both of those views with every breath in his body. If he and the other apostles of the New Testament were not divinely inspired in a unique and authoritative way, they were the most presumptuous of men, because they boldly and unequivocally claimed to speak and write in God's name. As apostles they spoke *to* the church, not on behalf of the church. The church derived its doctrine from the apostles, who received it directly from God (Eph. 3:5). They are never spoken of as apostles of the church but always as apostles of Jesus Christ.

Jesus told the Twelve, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (John 13:20). A short while later He said to them, "These things I have spoken to you, while abiding with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you" (14:25-26).

Because the apostles' teaching came directly from the Lord, the writings of Paul, Peter, John, and the others are every much as divinely inspired and authoritative as the words that Jesus spoke in person during His earthly ministry. It is for that reason that red letter Bibles may be misleading, because they suggest that the words Jesus spoke during His three-year earthly ministry are in some way more inspired and precious than other parts of Scripture. As Paul made clear to Timothy, however, "All Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16), who is the Author of its every word, whether through the prophets, the Lord Jesus Christ, or the apostles.

Because the Bible is God's own Word, to be subject to God is to be subject to the Bible. It is not an amalgam of human opinion but the repository of divine truth.

As discussed in the Introduction, **the churches of southern Galatia** were in

the central Asia Minor cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, where Paul had ministered on both his first and second missionary journeys (Acts 13:14–14:23; 16:1-5). The fact that Paul founded those **churches** certainly gave him some authority in dealing with them (cf. 1 Cor. 4:14-21, where Paul expresses his right to reprimand the Corinthians because he was their spiritual father).

The mention of these **churches** is brief and impersonal, and there is an apparent lack of the amenities usually found in Paul's epistles. His resentment of their defection from the gospel of grace forced him to dispense with any commendation or personal remarks, and he simply gave a gospel greeting before he rebuked them.

PAUL'S MESSAGE

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (1:3-4)

As Paul explains later in the epistle, the gospel he preached was “not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal. 1:11-12). Two of the most precious words related to that God-given gospel are **grace** and **peace**. The first is the source of salvation and the second is the result. **Grace** is positional, **peace** is practical, and together they flow **from God our Father** through His Son and our Savior, **the Lord Jesus Christ**.

In the Greek culture of Paul's day the common greeting was *chara* (“joy”). But although joy is among the many blessings Christians receive from God and should reflect in their lives (Gal. 5:22), the distinctly Christian greeting of **grace . . . and peace** held special meaning and significance for Paul and for other believers in the early church.

Since it offered no grace and provided no peace, the law system being taught by the lying Judaizers is attacked even in this simple greeting. If being right with God and possessing salvation is by works, as those false teachers maintained, then it is not of grace (Rom. 4:4-5) and can bring no peace, since one never knows if he has enough good works to be eternally secure.

In verse 4 Paul gives a succinct summary of the true gospel of **grace** and **peace**, showing its nature, its object, and its source.

THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL: CHRIST'S ATONING DEATH AND RESURRECTION

who gave Himself for our sins, (1:4a)

In turning from grace to a legalistic system of salvation by works, the Galatians had ignored the significance of the death of Christ.

The heart of the gospel is Christ's willing sacrifice of **Himself for our sins**. Salvation is not earned by one's efforts to eliminate sin, but by one's trust in God's

promise to forgive sin through the work of Jesus Christ. His atoning death was the most essential part of the divine plan of redemption, without which all of His teachings and miraculous works would have been meaningless and a mockery. Apart from Christ's sacrificial death, His earthly ministry would have portrayed the power and truth of a great and wonderful God—but a God with whom men could never be reconciled, because they had no way out of their sin. Since no man can eliminate sin by works (Rom. 3:20), it must be forgiven. That is why it was absolutely necessary that “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). If Christ had not died on our behalf, He could not have been raised on our behalf; and if He had not been raised, Paul says, then preaching the gospel would be vain, trusting in the gospel would be worthless, and all men would still be in their sins (1 Cor. 15:14-17).

The statement **who gave Himself for our sins** affirms that the purpose of Christ's coming was to be a sin offering (cf. 3:13).

THE OBJECT OF THE GOSPEL: TO DELIVER FROM THE PRESENT AGE

that He might deliver us out of this present evil age, (1:4b)

The purpose of the gospel is to **deliver** (the Greek subjunctive expresses purpose) those who believe in Christ from **this present evil age**. Jesus' death was a rescue operation, the only possible means of saving men from the doomed world and from eternal death by providing for them eternal life.

Exaireō (**deliver**) carries the idea of rescuing from danger. The word was used by Stephen in his sermon before the Sanhedrin as he described the divine deliverance of Joseph and the children of Israel from Egyptian affliction (Acts 7:10, 34). Peter used the word to describe God's deliverance of him from prison (Acts 12:11), and the Roman commander Claudius Lysias used it of his rescue of Paul from the belligerent mob in Jerusalem (23:27; cf. v. 10). Galatians 1:4 contains the only metaphorical use of the term in the New Testament.

Age (*aiōn*) does not refer to a period of time but to a passing, transitory system, in this case the **evil**, satanic world system that has dominated the world since the Fall and will continue to dominate it until the Lord's return. Although they are not removed from the earth until they die or are raptured, believers are rescued **out of this present evil age** the moment they receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They are still in the world, but they are no longer of it (John 17:11, 14-18; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 5:5). The faithful Christian life is the heavenly life lived on earth.

THE SOURCE OF THE GOSPEL: THE WILL OF GOD

according to the will of our God and Father, (1:4c)

The source of the saving gospel of Jesus Christ is the sovereign, loving, compassionate, gracious **will of our God and Father**, who “so loved the world, that

He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Jesus prayed in the Garden, "Father, if Thou art willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Thine be done" (Luke 22:42). It was *not* the Father's will for that cup to be removed, because otherwise the world could not be saved. It was the **will** of the **Father** for His precious Son to die in order that those who trust in Him might live. The Father sent the Son to die, and the Son willingly laid down His life.

Specifically, every rescued believer is delivered because of the sovereign, gracious will of God. "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). Salvation is thus removed from the will of man and is buried deep in the sovereign decree of God.

PAUL'S MOTIVE

to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen. (1:5)

Paul concludes his introduction with a doxology fitting for such a saving God. His motive for writing to the Galatian churches was that he might acknowledge that God is worthy of **glory forevermore**. The apostle's supreme purpose was to glorify his Lord, and he calls all believers to do everything "to the glory of God" (1 Cor. 10:31).

In these five opening verses of Galatians Paul covers the four stages of man's salvation. The first stage was the sovereign decree of God to save, the second was the death of Christ for man's sins, the third was the appointment of apostles to testify to that divine provision, and the fourth was the gift of God's grace and peace to those who believe in Jesus Christ. In each of the stages the Father and the Son work together, because Their will and Their work are always one (John 5:30; 6:38; 10:30).

Paul and the other apostles were commissioned and sent out by the Father and the Son, and the grace that brings salvation and the peace that salvation brings are likewise both from the Father and the Son. Salvation is provided, preached, and granted by the common operation of God the Father and God the Son. Together They planned salvation, together They provide salvation, together They announce salvation, and together They grant salvation to every person who comes to Them in faith.

Amen expresses the affirmation fitting the worthiness of God to receive glory for such a wondrous provision of eternal, gracious salvation. Alan Cole writes of this word: "When the old-fashioned Cantonese-speaking Christian says at the end of a prayer *shing sam shoh uen* ("with all my heart this is what I wish") he approaches very nearly the original Hebrew meaning" (*The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970], p. 37).