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# 1

## GREETINGS

1:1-5

This letter to a young church (to borrow an idea from J. B. Phillips) follows the customary pattern of letters written during the first century. In these communications, the writer names himself and his addressee, sends a greeting, and then launches into the main body of the letter with its statement of the business at hand. Although greetings are in order toward the end of a first-century letter, they are not always included. Paul does not extend them in Galatians, though he does in other letters.

Whether Paul's writings should be classified as letters or epistles is a question of more than academic interest. Though the two are similar in form, the epistle is usually described as a conscious literary effort designed for publication, whereas a letter is private in character (whether written to an individual or group), is destined to meet a specific need, and is not designed for posterity. While most of Paul's writings clearly bear more of the characteristics of a letter than an epistle, their literary elements should not be ignored. Moreover, although the apostle possibly did not consciously write for posterity, the Holy

Spirit obviously meant that his writings should have a continuing relevance. In fact, Paul in some instances intended that his message be circulated beyond its original circle of readers (see, e. g., Col 4:16).

From the very first verse of Galatians it is clear that this letter is quite different in tone from Paul's other writings. There is nothing unusual about the name Paul, the apostle's Gentile name, because it is always used of him in connection with his Gentile work. Nor is there anything unusual about the fact that he calls himself an apostle, because he does also in six other salutations (1 Co, 2 Co, Eph, Col, 1 Ti, 2 Ti). But in the Galatian churches, agitators had challenged the author's right to the title of apostle—his right to speak authoritatively. Thus Paul is more self-consciously on the offensive than in any of his other epistles. Immediately he seeks to make clear the divine source of his apostleship.

“Envoy” is perhaps the best translation of *apostle* (Gk, *apostolos*), though “delegate,” “messenger,” or “ambassador” are other valid translations in various contexts (e.g., “messenger” in Phil 2:25; 2 Co 8:23). Even before Jesus applied this descriptive term to the Twelve it apparently had attained a certain official connotation among the Jews. It referred to an envoy accredited by some authority and entrusted with a special message. This usage continued through the first century in Jewish-Christian circles, as is evident from the *Didache*, or *Teaching of the Twelve*, a church manual composed early in the second century.

If these troublemakers who sought to destroy the ministry of the gospel in Galatia claimed authority as envoys of the mother church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:12), Paul would

meet them head on. His commission came not from men. Probably he meant to imply that his apostolic commission was not from the Twelve. Or he may have meant that it did not come from the church of Antioch (Ac 13:1-3), which some may have thought to be inferior to a Jerusalem commission. Moreover, his commission came not through or by means of man. The shift from the plural to the singular apparently occurs to parallel with the reference to Jesus Christ. This shift tends to confirm Paul's belief in Christ as divine, because he declares that his apostolic authority comes not from *man* but Jesus Christ. The commission came by or through the mediation of Jesus Christ from God the Father. In making such a claim, no doubt Paul had in mind his direct confrontation with the risen Christ on the Damascus Road. The emphasis on the resurrection of Christ in the last clause of verse 1 certainly reflects the tremendous impression made on Paul by the sudden realization while on the Damascus Road that Jesus really had risen from the dead (Ac 9:4-6). Paul's apostleship or position as an envoy was then superior to any commission that the Judaizers may have received, for it came directly from the Father through His risen and glorified Son.

After a parenthetical statement on the source of his apostleship, Paul stops to associate the brethren with him in sending greetings (1:2). Normally Paul singled out individuals who were joining him in such pleasantries (e.g., 1 Co 1:1; Col 1:1). Here he may have avoided the practice because no one known to them was present. Or possibly he wished in this way to insure a greater independence of message and apostleship—these came from

God. He was dependent on no man, neither apostles nor fellow workers. Even if Galatian Christians were present at the time it may not have been wise to name them because their home churches (now steeped in legalism) might have repudiated their message and friendship. "The brethren . . . with me" does not seem to refer to a church, as some have supposed, because he never associates a church with himself in any of his other epistles. Probably these are simply his special friends and workers with him at the time. *Brethren* (*adelphoi*) as a term signifying religious relationship was applied to religious associations at least as early as the second century B.C. But it was given a new depth and beauty by Christians. Christian brethren are individuals who enjoy a common bond because they have become members of the household of faith on the basis of the finished work of Christ.

The addressees of the epistle are the "churches of Galatia." As already noted in the Introduction, these were probably located in Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. Possibly this is the only time Paul addressed a group of churches, although the Ephesian\* letter may also have been a circular letter to churches of the western part of the province of Asia Minor.

*Church* (Gk, *ekklēsia*) is a beautiful word. It means "called-out ones" and in the New Testament context refers to individuals called out from a doomed and dying world by the grace of God. Of course these called-out ones are

\*"Ephesus" (Eph 1:1) does not appear in the best manuscripts and some argue that a blank was left here in the original to be filled in by each of the churches in the area. They argue further that the reason we have "Ephesus" appearing in the New Testament book is that only the Ephesian copy of this circular letter survived.

to remain in their society as salt and light to accomplish whatever purposes God has for them there. Paul used the term *church* to refer to an assembly gathered for worship (1 Co 14:28), a group of believers meeting in one house (Phile 2), believers of a town (Ro 16:1), and the whole body of believers everywhere (Col 1:18, 24).

Following proper epistolary form, the writer has identified himself and his addressees and now proceeds to pen a greeting, or salutation. "Grace be to you and peace" is the apostle's formula, appearing in all his letters to the churches. Some believe Paul coined this formula and others borrowed it from him. The common Greek greeting was *chairein*, "joy" to you. It is changed here to *charis*, meaning "grace" to you. "Peace" (Gk, *eirēnē*; Heb, *shalom*) is the Hebrew greeting. One would expect the apostle to the Gentiles to use a Greek greeting, especially when writing to churches of the Greek East. But he links the Greek with the Hebrew greeting, symbolizing the union of Jew and Greek in one body, the middle wall of partition having been broken down in Christ. Gentiles have now been admitted to privileges which had been peculiar to Israel. Grace always precedes peace in these salutations, for the free and unmerited favor of God must be extended before the individual can experience either peace with God or the peace of God. Findlay puts the relationship well:

*Grace* is the sum of all blessing bestowed by God; *peace*, . . . the sum of all blessing experienced by man. *Grace* is the Father's good will and bounty in Christ to His undeserving children; *peace*, the rest and reconciliation, the recovered health and gladness of the child brought home

to the Father's house, dwelling in the light of his Father's face. *Grace* is the fountain of redeeming love; *peace* is the "river of life proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb," that flows calm and deep through each believing soul, the river whose "streams make glad the city of God."<sup>1</sup>

Grace and peace come from the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. The second *from* is not in the Greek and should not be supplied. Grace and peace come from a single divine source. The Father and Son cooperate in closest union in preparing and carrying out the plan of man's redemption. Nothing speaks more forcefully for the deity of Christ than the way He is linked with the Father here.

While the Father and the Son may have cooperated fully in devising the plan of redemption, it was the Son who "gave himself" unto death as an offering for our sins (1:4). This is a statement of the true ground of acceptance before God. In turning to a system of salvation on the basis of good works, the Galatians had practically ignored the grace of God and the substitutionary death of Christ (cf. 2:21; 5:4). Some New Testament passages refer to Christ's giving Himself for sin and some refer to His sacrifice for sinners. The former focus on the effect of His work in dealing with sin and the latter on the motive for His sacrifice—love for sinners.

Christ gave Himself for our sins in order to "deliver us from this present evil world." Our sins enslaved us and Christ sought to pluck us out, or deliver us, as from bondage. The verb in the Greek suggests that He who delivers us has an interest in the result of His act. Certainly de-

liverance would come through the work of Christ, not through human effort. "This present evil world [age]" refers to the corrupting influences of the world and its works. The phrase has been well translated "the present age with all its evils." This age is under a god (2 Co 4:4) or rulers (1 Co 2:6) of its own who are in opposition to the eternal God, the King of the ages (1 Ti 1:17; cf. Eph 2:2-7).

Christ's death on the cross was "according to the will of God." Jesus was fully conscious throughout His ministry that what He did was according to a divinely predetermined plan and He was subject to that plan. He predicted His death, burial, and resurrection on occasion. When in a dangerous spot He could know that His "time was not yet come." He is quoted as saying, "I come . . . to do thy will, O God" (Heb 10:7). After His prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, He prayed, "Father, . . . take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt" (Mk 14:36).

"God and our Father." Salvation was provided by the sovereign God, who has by grace alone become our Father. We stand in filial relation to Him through no effort of our own. Thus the apostle paves the way for the main argument of the epistle. Next he breaks out in a paean of praise to such a wonderful God. "To whom be the glory," the glory which is exclusively His and which properly belongs to Him. This glory He will not share with men nor surrender to men who seek to gain their salvation in whole or in part by their own efforts. Throughout eternity He will solely be the object of praise by redeemed ones who testify that "salvation is of the LORD" (Jon 2:9).