

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part two - Teaching #2131

Sunday, October 3rd, 2021 - 10 a.m.

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THERE IS ONLY ONE CORRECT STARTING POINT FOR YOUR FAITH

Galatians 1:1-5 - “Paul, an apostle — not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead — [2] and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia. [3] Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, [4] who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father. [5] To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

These are very carefully crafted words. This is more than just a casual greeting. Paul is setting the stage for dealing with the central issues that these false teachers (whom we mentioned last week) were raising with these new Christians.

1) THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF AUTHORITY IN RELIGION

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:1-2 - “Paul, an apostle — not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead — [2] and all the brothers who are with me: To the churches of Galatia.”

This is the only place to start when presenting the Gospel in the marketplace of world religions. Most of the first Christians were converts from **other** world religions. This is why Paul begins with the crucial question of **authority** in spiritual matters. Why should people embrace the Gospel if they already had their own religion?

Particularly, why should these people listen to Paul rather than the false teachers who were trying to turn their hearts?

Paul's main point in these first two verses is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and His Cross can't be placed on the buffet of other religious systems. This is his reason for stressing that he was not "**sent from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father**"(1).

Notice how Paul's Christology shines here. He separates and distinguishes between Jesus Christ and mere men. His Trinitarian theology stands out.

Paul's statements would be rated as presumptuous in our tolerant age. But he still labors the point that his message isn't just some opinion about God or some man-made system of searching God out. Paul is defending the **unique truth claims** of Christianity. Jesus never even professed to be like other religious leaders and prophets. He wasn't a human teacher pointing out the way to God. Jesus was **God with us**. Jesus ends the search for God in a way no other religious leader or prophet can.

This is one of the central points of what we have come to call the great commission from Jesus. One of the ground-breaking aspects from Jesus' lips rarely get talked about - **Matthew 28:18-20** - **“Jesus came near and said to them, “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” - IPAD TEXT**

Question: *Why does Jesus begin these strong sending words talking about His authority?* Because it's no small thing to go to groups of people who ***already have*** their own religions and belief systems, thank you very much - and tell them ***they're wrong and must change.***

This is the living conviction behind Paul's strong words about his own apostolic calling and authority. Paul's words serve to refute two positions within our religious landscape for interpreting the content of Scriptural revelation:

- a) ***The liberal view*** - This view (and this is vastly oversimplified) interprets the words of the Apostles as the religious contemplations of men, on no higher level than the musings and opinions of interpreters in the twenty-first century. The Apostles, like us, were searchers, trying to make sense of the things they saw taking place in their world, just as we must interpret and make sense of the things we see in ours.

But this clearly won't fit with Paul's words. In fact, he clearly asks these Christians to ***reject*** the words of the false teachers ***precisely on the basis of his authority as a divinely appointed Apostle***. In another place in this letter Paul tells these churches that if anyone teaches another Gospel than the one they received from him, that person (even if it's an ***angel***) is to be accursed.

There's a second false view Paul's words repudiate:

- b) ***The ecclesiastical view*** - This is the other dominant distortion of religious authority that bears on our age. This view holds that the church is the cradle for the Scriptures. In this view the declarations and traditions of the church are frequently added to the Scriptures, and given equal authority. It is predominantly true in Roman Catholicism today.

But Paul makes it clear that his message wasn't bestowed upon him by any arm of the church, but by Jesus Christ Himself:

IPAD TEXTS - Galatians 1:1 - "Paul, an apostle — *not from men or by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead....*"

Galatians 1:11 - "For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel preached by me *is not of human origin.*"

Galatians 1:12 - "For I *did not receive it from a human source and I was not taught it, but it came by a revelation of Jesus Christ.*"

His Apostolic authority wasn't rooted in any human person or institutional system. His message was received from God the Father and God the Son, and all of us, including the Church, are under this final revelation of authority.

2) THE ESSENTIAL NATURE OF THE GOSPEL

Some things are essential and some things aren't. What are the essential elements to a genuinely Christian Gospel?

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:3 - “Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ...”

While **grace** and **peace** are monosyllables, they are pregnant with theological substance. All of the core issues of the Gospel are here in seed form.

- a) **Grace** - Grace defines the **source** of salvation. Everything **has its beginning in God's grace, not man's works**. This cuts to the heart of the Judiazers' false teaching. Any concept of achieving my status before God is eliminated. Salvation finds its spring and root in what God has freely offered, not in what man has accomplished.
- b) **Peace** - Peace describes the **fruit** of salvation. Peace is perhaps the most beautiful single word description of the result of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But the **kind** of peace Paul has in mind is very specific. Many things can bring **peace of mind**. But only the Gospel can bring **peace with God**. This is what the Gospel Paul declared was all about. It brings peace with God where there was once enmity and wrath. It restores peace between a holy God and sinful people:

IPAD TEXT - Romans 5:1 - “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have *peace with God* through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now the reason for Paul’s anger with these false teachers comes more sharply into focus. Because only the true Gospel can touch the core of man’s greatest need, any distortion in its content and message would be fatal. In other words, these false teachers weren’t bruising Paul’s ego. They were cutting the lost off from God’s grace and power and hope.

3) **THE HISTORIC EVENT FROM WHICH GOD’S GRACE AND PEACE FLOW**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:4 - “...who gave himself for our sins to *rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.*”

What wonderfully rich words! Fully understood and appreciated, they will keep Christians from a multitude of errors and sharpen their witness in this dark world:

- a) **Christ died for our sins - "...who gave Himself for our sins...."** There is no saving benefit in merely knowing that Jesus Christ died. It's knowing **why** He died that is crucial. This was not another execution. It was not an **ordinary** death in that sense. He did not die as another religious martyr. His death was not merely an example of another great man who willingly died for his convictions. None of this even comes close to the teaching of the New Testament.

Paul's words here are sharp and penetrating. Christ's death was linked to **us** - **"...who gave Himself for our sins."** In other words, His death was a **redemptive death**. It was a **rescuing death**. It was, somehow, a **forgiving death**. It **accomplished something beyond example or heroism**. It was the only death in the history of the world through which **divine forgiveness can come**.

But there is even more than forgiveness being described here:

- b) **Christ died to "rescue us from this present evil age"** - The greatest tragedy in the **world** is the **rejection** of the forgiveness offered through the Cross. The greatest tragedy in the **church** is to **limit** the benefit of the Cross to forgiveness.

It is a very deficient view of the Cross that only speaks of it as a payment for sins committed. Truly, it *is* that. And we should be eternally grateful for it. But the Cross is not *just* a payment for sins committed. Paul saw a tremendous *power* in the work Christ Jesus on the Cross that extended far beyond mere forgiveness.

The Cross was a *gateway between two worlds*. Our world of sin and darkness was, in Paul's mind and vocabulary, called this "*present evil age*." In other passages he makes it clear just why this is so:

IPAD TEXT - Colossians 1:13 - "He has *rescued us* from the domain of darkness and *transferred us* into the kingdom of the Son he loves."

This "*domain of darkness*" is describing the same thing as "*this present evil age*." In the apostle John's words, this whole world system lies in the sway of the "*evil one*."

The Cross is God's plan to ***transfer people out of one realm and, in Christ Jesus, place them into another!*** And Paul's whole point is that we must not limit this transfer of citizenship to something merely positional or symbolic. ***Christians must, if they embrace the Cross at all, manifest the life of the age to come right in the middle of this present evil age!***

Paul doesn't see this as some added level of super-spirituality. This is the very ***core*** of what it means to come to the Cross at all. One really can't ***merely be saved. Transformation is part of the deal***. If there is no ***transformation***, there is no ***salvation***. Transformation, true enough, may come gradually, it may come with struggles and set-backs, but it ***is*** - it absolutely ***is*** - part and parcel of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

I am frequently grieved at the wholesale blindness to this core issue of the Gospel in the church. I have thought a great deal about the words of God through Jeremiah the prophet, as He confronted the ongoing worldliness of the people of God:

IPAD TEXT - Jeremiah 7:9-10 - “Do you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, burn incense to Baal, and follow other gods that you have not known? [10] Then do you come and stand before me in this house that bears my name and say, “We are rescued, so we can continue doing all these detestable acts”?”

How ironic! These people - these descendants of Abraham (remember John’s words as the Pharisees came to him for baptism?) were actually using the fact that they had been **delivered** from bondage by God’s grace to justify their continuing in wickedness!

Paul says the whole **goal** of the Cross is to **pull people out from this present evil age.**

- c) **Christ died “according to the will of our God the Father” -**
 This too is a crucially important central point. Jesus does not step in and protect us from a vengeful God. God the Father is the **author** of our salvation. It’s His idea. We’re not **hiding from God behind the blood of Jesus:**

IPAD TEXT - John 3:16 - “For God loved the world in this way: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.”

Father God was not a ***detached*** personality in the salvation of mankind:

IPAD TEXT - 2 Corinthians 5:19 - "...That is, *in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and he has committed the message of reconciliation to us.*"

The death of Christ wasn't a fluke - an accident of history. It wasn't a religion that went bad, or a teaching that never quite made it off the ground. It was all in the heart of God from the beginning. This is what set Paul's heart ablaze. This is what makes the Gospel of Jesus Christ different and distinct and ultimately superior to anything else on the religious shelf today!

Let's not mar its beauty and power with a shabby, worldly lifestyle. And let us all, like Paul, preserve and defend the pure truth of its content for all who will come after us.