

## THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S GRACE COMES FROM GOD THROUGH MEN Galatians 1:1-5

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Did you meet anyone new after this past Sunday's worship service?

### INTRODUCTION

Has anyone you love ever begun to believe things or behave in ways that you knew would eventually harm him or her? How did you feel about what they were believing/doing? What did you do about it?

We can't be 100% sure, but probably, the "churches of Galatia" in v.2 include at least the churches that Paul and Barnabas started in the cities of Iconium, Lystra and Derbe as recorded in Acts 13 & 14. Most likely Paul wrote this letter to these churches sometime during their stay in Antioch as recorded in Acts 14:26 to 15:3.

Read Acts 15:1-5, Galatians 1:6, 3:1-5, 4:8-11, 17-20 & 5:7-12.  
Discuss these questions.

**A.** What appears to be the problem in the churches of Galatia that motivated Paul to write this letter?

*After Paul left the region of Galatia and returned to his home church in Antioch, Syria, a group of Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came to these churches and began to tell these non-Jewish Christians that it was not enough to have faith in Christ in order to go to heaven. These teachers from Jerusalem said that if the Gentile Christians were going to be accepted by God they must also become Jewish by being circumcised and following Jewish religious customs. They claimed that they were speaking on behalf of the apostles in Jerusalem, that this is what the original 12 apostles taught in Jerusalem and that Paul, who wasn't really an apostle, had changed the message and had taught them an incomplete gospel. What happened then in these churches of Galatia is that the people listened to these teachers from*

*Jerusalem and began to adopt Jewish religious ceremonies and circumcision. They began to believe that in order to be accepted by God they must not only believe in Jesus but also obey the OT law as interpreted by the Jews through the centuries.*

**B.** How does Paul feel about the Christians in these churches and what is happening to them?

*The emotion Paul has towards these Christians is very much the emotion that parents have when their children are heading down paths of destruction. When your child is heading down a path of destruction, the pain you feel can only be described as the pain of childbirth. The language of Paul in this letter is fierce, often angry and always passionate because he views these people as his children who are heading down a path of ruin and he is going to do everything he can do to rescue them from that devastation that is coming. When we remember that this letter was written by the direction, under the influence of God's Holy Spirit and is thus part of God's word to his people we understand that the passion of Paul for these people to return from the foolishness that they are embracing is the passion of God for his people. God, in this letter is passionately pursuing his church, his people.*

**C.** How does he feel about those who are teaching a "different gospel"?

*You can see how violently Paul opposed these teachers and their message in 1:8 & 5:12, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned." "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves." He was as mad about what these men were teaching the churches of Galatia as any parent in here would be to find out that your child's school teacher was telling the children that doing drugs and shoplifting was a great way to live. His opinion of what was going on in these churches was the same as yours would be if you found out that the Boy Scout leaders in your son's troop were teaching the boys how to be Islamic fundamentalists and how to blow up buildings and people as suicide bombers and your son was buying into what his Scout leaders were saying.*

In this letter, God through the apostle Paul is pursuing his people and defending them so that they are not destroyed but are saved. It is a fierce letter that is motivated by the fierce and jealous love of God for his people. In this opening paragraph, the apostle Paul takes the gloves off and begins his relentless pursuit of these people. In the opening paragraph we immediately see how it is that God pursues his people.

## STUDY

1. According to Mark 3:13-19 & Luke 6:12-16 how did the original 12 apostles become apostles?

*Jesus spent a night in prayer and the next morning appointed, from among all of his disciples, twelve, whom he designated to be apostles. His purpose was that they should be with him and that they should go out and preach. He gave them authority to drive out demons and to heal.*

2. According to Acts 1:21-26 how did the eleven apostles, after Jesus' ascension, choose a man to take the place of Judas, the betrayer? What were the requirements for being an apostle?

*Only someone who had been with Jesus from the time he was baptized by John until he ascended into heaven was eligible to be an apostle. They chose between two men by praying and then casting lots (Like drawing straws, short straw wins.). They used the casting of lots so that God by his providence (Proverbs 16:33) would show whom he wanted. The task of the apostle was to bear witness to the resurrection of Christ.*

3. According to Acts 9:1-19, when and how did Paul become an apostle?

*While on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians there, the risen Christ confronted him and appointed him to carry his name to the Gentiles.*

4. What might those who were opposing Paul's teaching in Galatia have told those in the churches there about Paul's claim to be an apostle?

*They were probably arguing that since Paul did not know Jesus during his life, he cannot be an apostle because he does not fit the qualifications laid down by the original apostles in Acts 1. They would claim that he could not be an apostle because he was not an eyewitness of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.*

5. What does Paul say about himself in vv. 1-2 to counteract this argument? Why describe the Father, as the one who raised Jesus from the dead? Why say this letter is also from unnamed brothers who are with him?

*First, he says he is an apostle. He immediately claims that he is on the same level of authority as Peter, James and John, the apostles in Jerusalem. He does not represent any man or group of men and he did not become an apostle by any man appointing him to the office of an apostle. Rather he is an apostle by the appointment of Jesus Christ and God the Father. In Luke 6:12-16 we are told that Jesus spent a whole night in prayer prior to appointing the 12 apostles. The implication is that while Jesus appointed the apostles he did so at the direction of God the Father. Therefore, all the original apostles could claim to be apostles by Jesus Christ and God the Father, just like Paul. The problem is that Jesus was no longer living on earth in the flesh when Paul claims to have been appointed by him as an apostle. This is why, as soon as Paul says that he was made an apostle by Jesus and the Father, he immediately says that this is the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. The point Paul is making is this: if Jesus in the days of his flesh had the authority to appoint the apostles of his church, then why does he not, as the resurrected Christ, who is seated at the right hand of God, have the right and the ability to appoint him as an apostle? Are they going to argue that the resurrected, glorified Christ has less authority than Christ in the days of his flesh?*

*Now notice in verse 2 he then adds that he is not writing to them by himself but with all the brothers who are with him. This is a unique phrase in the 13 letters of Paul. Every other letter is only from him or*

from he and one or two other named individuals. It is either from “Paul to the saints in Ephesus” or from “Paul, Silas and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians.” But here it is Paul and “all the brothers with me to the churches of Galatia.” Why mention an entire group of unnamed Christians as the coauthors with him of this letter? The point is that there is an entire community of Christians who acknowledge Paul as an apostle and who confirm that the message he is delivering is the gospel of Christ. Again, the false teachers are trying to show that Paul is a “Johnny-come-lately” who is working outside of the established church. They have painted Paul as a loner, a renegade and therefore not to be trusted. Paul, on the other hand, wants them to know that there is a great number of Christians who acknowledge his authority and his message.

6. Why does Paul begin by asserting his authority as an apostle?

It is very important to remember that Paul is not making this defense of his authority because he can't stand not being respected. He knows that the eternal life of these people hangs on whether they treat him as an apostle or not. If they submit to these false teachers as having true authority and reject him, he knows they will go to hell and he is going to exert all of his powers of persuasion and use every godly means at his disposal to keep that from happening. They claim to come from the apostles in Jerusalem. Also, they claim to have been appointed as teachers by the apostles. He begins his pursuit of these people by clearly declaring that he has more authority than these false teachers because unlike them his commission does not come from men or by men but by the resurrected Son of God and by His Father.

7. Can any pastor, elder, bishop, teacher in the church claim what Paul claims here, “sent not from me or by men but by Jesus Christ and God the Father”? Why or why not?

No human being throughout all the history of the world, apart from the eleven original apostles, Matthias who was appointed an apostle in place of Judas in Acts 2 and Paul can say what Paul says about himself here. He claims to be directly appointed by Jesus and the Father **apart from** any human intermediary. No pastor, elder, bishop or any other church leader can claim the same thing. Every other

teacher in the church, since the appointment of Paul, is appointed by God but from men and by men. We see this in Acts 14 in these very churches when Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps through these Galatian cities and “appointed elders for them in each church”. Timothy, Titus and Silas are sent to the churches from Paul and by Paul. After these original apostles died, every other God ordained minister of Christ is ordained by means of human beings.

**God pursues his people by his word delivered through people.**

8. According to v. 3, what does Paul want for these people?

His desire for these wayward people is that they experience the unmerited favor of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. He wants them to grasp the free grace of God that is offered to sinners and the peace with God and others that flows from being a recipient of that grace. He is not out to win an argument just for the sake of winning an argument. He is not trying to set them straight because he cannot stand it when people don't explain the Christian gospel right. His motive in this letter is that these people experience the amazing grace of God and the life of peace that his grace produces.

9. What three things does Paul tell them about Christ in v. 4?

1. Christ gave himself in behalf of our sins.
2. He did this to deliver us from this present evil age
3. He did this according to the will of God the Father

10. What do these statements tell us about ourselves and our condition?

We are sinners who are helplessly captivated by this present evil age. Our sins are not small, inconsequential things. Sin is our biggest problem. Sin is what damns us to hell. Sin is what enslaves us and places us under God's just wrath. We are helpless to escape our sins. You cannot deliver yourself from this present evil age by means of this present evil age. We are part of it and enslaved by it and therefore we must have a deliverer from outside of it if we are going to escape. You cannot escape this present evil age and the doom that is coming upon

*it by using some resource in this age to escape. You are trapped by your sin and by the rule of the devil. Sin must be horrible if it took the sinless Son of God to die in order for it to be forgiven.*

**11. What does this tell us about Christ and his work?**

*Christ gave himself for our sins and it was God the Father's will that Christ give himself for our sins. No one took Christ's life from him. He voluntarily gave himself in accordance with the will of his Father. God the Son and God the Father both agreed that this was the way salvation would be attained for God's people. Forgiveness of sins is not based upon what we have done but based upon what Christ has done. It is his death that secures forgiveness. He died the death we deserve. Therefore we cannot die. God has punished Christ for our sins therefore he cannot punish us for our sins. Either you must die for your sins or Christ must have given himself in behalf of your sins. He comes to us from outside this present evil age as our deliverer, our Savior from it. He comes free from the powers of this evil age and rescues us from it and the doom that is coming upon it.*

**12. How does this summary of the gospel by Paul contradict the false teacher's claim that Christ's work is not enough but that only those who trust Jesus and live like Jews will go to heaven?**

*Whenever someone says that their salvation depends upon something that they do, they are automatically declaring that they are not sinners or that their sins are not really a very big deal. When I am able to overcome the debt of my sin by something I do or perform I am declaring that my sins are not all that bad, nothing to get excited about. When we say that we must do something to pay for sins then we place ourselves outside of Christ's death and thus under a death penalty. The wages of sin is death, not being circumcised and obeying the Jewish law. The only way to pay for sin is to die, not be baptized or pray a prayer asking Jesus into your heart or loving your wife or confessing your sins or being a missionary. If you get pulled over for speeding and go to court and tell the judge the reason you should not be required to pay the fine is because you baked him a dozen cookies and you have always paid your taxes, he will not be impressed. If you insist that you must do something in addition to what Jesus has done or instead of what Jesus has done, you put yourself on death row. Either you must die for your sins or Christ must have given himself in behalf of your sins. When you*

*believe that your salvation is dependent upon something you must do you are telling the God who made you that he is an idiot, that you are smarter and wiser than he. Everything that is in this present age of men is evil whether it is the evil of sexual immorality or greed or deception or the evil of man-made religious performance. How can that which is a part of this present evil age deliver from this present evil age? That is Paul's logic. You cannot deliver yourself from this present evil age by means of this present evil age. We are part of it and enslaved by it and therefore we must have a deliverer from outside of it if we are going to escape.*

**13. How do you feel about what vv. 3-4 say about the way of salvation?**

**God pursues his people by the work of Christ.**

**14. According to v. 5 what is God's ultimate reason for saving us in this fashion? Why is this important to know?**

*God saves in this way for the glory of his own name. Therefore, when you claim that salvation can be had in any other way you are treating God with contempt, robbing him of the honor that is due to him alone. If salvation depends upon anything coming from you, any decision, any action, any emotion, then God is not the Savior. He is robbed of his glory if your salvation is not entirely his work, from beginning to end. As we work our way through Galatians over the next several months one way for us to think about what we are doing is seeing the various ways that God displays the glory of his name in our salvation and the ways that we humans try to rob him of his glory and seek to magnify the glory of our own names.*

*The fact that God is committed to the glory of his own name is the best news you can hear. If God did not care about the glory of his own name all of us would be headed for hell. There would be no heaven, no salvation. It is because God is passionately committed to the glory of his own nature being made manifest that Christ gave himself for our sins, grace and peace come from God to sinners, Paul was sent as an apostle and we are delivered from this present evil age.*

**15. Who is getting the credit for your salvation? How do you know?**

**God pursues his people for the glory of his own name.**