



## **Galatians 1:1-5**

### **Freed**

We are beginning our study through the book of Galatians today. Let's read today's passage to begin:

**Galatians 1:1-5** “Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through 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 our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

So this book begins by telling us it is written by the apostle Paul to the churches of Galatia. Galatia was not a city, but a Roman Province about half the size of NY State, and within that province there were a number of cities and in many of those cities, Paul had brought the message of Jesus and established churches on his first missionary journey.

And for us to understand Galatians, we have to understand what was going on in their churches as the reason for writing.

So let's look at what happened when these churches were established to get the back-story that will help us understand the rest of the book of Galatians. If you could turn to Acts 13...

Paul and his companion Barnabas were sent on a missionary journey to Galatia in around 48 AD, 18 years after Jesus rose from the dead. In Galatia, they would go to a city, find the synagogue, and because Paul was well-educated and a Pharisee, a Jewish religious leader, he would often be afforded the opportunity to speak there.

In Acts 13, Paul is in Antioch, a city in Galatia, and he is delivering this message in the synagogue - it was a long message so we won't read the whole thing but will pick up toward the end of it in verse 38:

**Acts 13 38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, 39 and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.**

So Paul has announced the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and he tells them that because of that, forgiveness of sins has been proclaimed, and Jesus will free you from everything the law of Moses couldn't free you from.

For people who were sincerely trying to live lives that were pleasing to God, this would have been welcome news. Because they were trying to follow the law of Moses, but still feeling the ways that it wasn't cutting it for them.

The law of Moses was a good thing, and it was given by God.

God didn't leave people wondering what he required of us, so He gave us His law: commands, like the ten commandments, to tell us what He requires, to tell us a little bit of what His holiness is like, to guide our lives, to show us how love plays out in our interactions with God and neighbor.

It was all good. God doesn't do bad things, so giving His law is a good thing, and striving to follow His law is a good thing.

But the problem is it was given to people who didn't have hearts that wanted to obey it. And even if we did, we just kept it up for a little while and then fell short - we made our new years resolutions, we rededicated ourselves to obey God at summer camp, and within a month or two we were off the wagon.

So it didn't do all that it could do because there was something wrong with us, not because there was something wrong with the law.

It would be like if someone gave you an incredible big screen TV to watch Josh Allen win the superbowl on, but you didn't have any electricity in your house. The TV is good, the Bills look good, but if there's no power in your house, neither the Bills nor the TV will do you any good.

So God commands us, and it would sure be good if we obeyed. But our hearts are sinful, not wanting to obey God on God's terms.

**So we took that good thing and turned it into something it was never meant to be.**

1) **In some cases, we made the law of God into a show.** We began to use looking like we obeyed the commands as a way **to prove ourselves to people or to look good to others, or to boast over others or feel superior to people who didn't seem to keep up as well as us.**

**We obeyed a few of the commands to look like we're doing well.** We started to use them to hide, always having to be phony and plastic to keep up an image.

2) **In some cases, we used obeying some of the commands as a way to feel good about ourselves** and secure in our future because we were now obeying God (at least the parts of his law we gravitated towards.)

3) **In some cases, we tried to use God's commands to save ourselves.** We thought that maybe I can prove myself to God by my obedience. Maybe I can earn His love or secure his blessings with my own obedience. **So we tried, and we worked hard. But that treadmill left us exhausted and joyless and insecure and afraid.**

4) **And at times we even felt like we were repressing** everything we wanted to do, to instead do these things we should do.

And the whole thing became a big exhausting religious project.

**I can't prove myself to people** - they're fickle and judgmental and I will never be all that people want me to be. They won't notice the commands I've kept, they'll just nail me for the ones I've broken.

**I can't prove myself to myself because** I know my past and my secrets and I can't take care of those.

**I can't prove myself to God** because he knows my true resume', there will be no impressing him.

God gave a perfect law, a universal law, written in stone. The problem wasn't the law, it wasn't that it wasn't absolute. It was that the law was given to people with hearts of stone - hardened against it. They couldn't receive it, and in their rebellion it even made them worse. So God made a promise:

**Ezekiel 36:25 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. 28 You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.**

So God's law, those letters in the stone, didn't fix the people with hearts of stone. So God promised that He would one day do a work not just on them, but in them, to cause them to obey His laws. He would give them a new heart, a soft heart. And He would put His Spirit in them.

That was going to be the solution.

And Paul gets to the synagogue to say that the day when God would do this is here. Moses' law couldn't save you, so in Jesus you can be freed.

**Imagine how good these news sounds to people who are trying to keep the commands, trying to be religious, but failing. Think of how good this news is to us.**

We can embrace this good news that we don't have to exhaust ourselves trying to please God, because Jesus pleased the Father for us.

We don't have to be on a religious treadmill where we always have to do good works to get God to like us, because that would never feel like enough.

We don't have to perform well to get other Christians to like us, because we love and accept one another because of what Jesus did.

And it doesn't make us look down on others if we believe it: It humbles us because it says we were so bad Jesus had to die for us, but it assures us because he did die for us to pay it ALL.

That understanding of grace frees us from the burden, frees us from maintaining an image we could never maintain, frees us from having to pretend, frees us from having to

make ourselves good. It frees us from everything from which we couldn't be freed by our religious observances and attempts to keep commands.

And we need liberation not only from strict, old-school religion that can't change our hearts with all of its commands. We need liberation from cool contemporary religion that gives us:

7 practices to be effective in everything.

4 steps to a healthy family.

5 ways to stay out of debt.

Not because that advice isn't good. But because the heart underneath our inability to follow the steps needs to change. Sometimes we need financial advice, and it's good like law is good. But sometimes the reason we load up on credit card debt isn't a financial crisis, it isn't because we didn't know better. It's because we expected the purchase to satisfy.

Sometimes the reason I'm not what I should be at home is not because I don't know what to do, but because my heart gets hard and we won't be humble and do what I know I should do. We need advice and direction, for sure. But our biggest problem is we don't want to follow the good things we know to do because of a deeper problem.

**And believing the message of Jesus's death and resurrection for our sins is what liberates us on a heart level. And there's no better news than that.**

Commands and advice are good, but they are the thermostat, not the furnace. They show us our temperature, but they don't warm us. They tell us we need to be warmed, and if we use them the right way they send us running to Jesus for a rescue.

So Paul goes into the synagogue where sincere religious people are trying - trying to obey. And he liberates them by telling them about the resurrection of Jesus.

There is no greater news than that Gospel - it is not anything we do to connect ourselves to God - it is what He did for us!

And that's the message all throughout the Bible:

**Titus 3 3 For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. 4 But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.**

This is great news - all we once were was washed by Jesus.

We are heirs, we are God's kids. We don't have to do anything, we just receive his mercy by faith.

So we don't earn our forgiveness to connect to God - from the beginning to the end we are right with God because of what Jesus did on the cross. It's not by following rules, it's not by adhering to dos and don't's.

And maybe today you're not a Christian, and in part it's because you thought that to become one you had to keep the moral laws first, or take part in some ceremony, or follow some outward observance. But we are not forgiven because we kept codes and laws. We are forgiven because we realized we broke them, and turned the only place we could turn, to Jesus Christ, for washing.

So Paul announces this great news: Moses's law is good and a massive gift, but Jesus frees you.

He goes on:

**Acts 13:40-43 Beware, therefore, lest what is said in the Prophets should come about: 41 "Look, you scoffers, be astounded and perish; for I am doing a work in your days, a work that you will not believe, even if one tells it to you." 42 As they went out, the people begged that these things might be told them the next Sabbath. 43 And after the meeting of the synagogue broke up, many Jews and devout converts to Judaism followed Paul and Barnabas, who, as they spoke with them, urged them to continue in the grace of God.**

So there's an amazing response - people start believing. And they want to hear more.

This is what the good news of Jesus does in people who really believe it - they want to hear it more! It's like eating at a great restaurant - you say "this is good, we need to eat here again. And we need to tell our friends about this place."

Our whole lives we carry guilt and fear of what God will do because of our failure, but then we hear that Jesus was crucified for our sins and rose again, giving us freedom and hope and a future. You can tell me that exact same story over and over again, keep telling it, I'll bring my friends to hear it - it is such a good meal, serve it again next week, I'll bring friends.

So the good news spreads:

**Acts 13:44 The next Sabbath almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.**

People came out to hear it! It wasn't because the church had some amazing programs or a great sound system or perfect lighting, or because they were giving them a bunch of really great advice for life or motivational speeches, it was because the good news of Jesus was such good news. So they gathered around, standing room only, to hear more.

But that wasn't the only response:

**Acts 13:45-52 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. 46 And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, "It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles. 47 For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, "I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth." 48 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. 49 And the word of the Lord was spreading throughout the whole region. 50 But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. 52 And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.**

So people are believing the good news of Jesus and rejoicing, and some, who are jealous of the influence of the Christians and convinced that the law alone could save them, or that they at the very least had to add their own efforts to the efforts of Christ to make themselves true Christians, started opposing them.

And this conflict happened all around Galatia - People responded favorably to the word, and others thought that even if Jesus was legit, surely you needed Jesus plus obedience to the Jewish ceremonial laws to be truly saved. Specifically, they said you needed Jesus plus circumcision to be a true child of God. In Acts 15:1, it's made clear what their message is: *"Unless you are circumcised...you cannot be saved."*

These people were known as the Judaizers.

Phillip Ryken defines these Judaizers as those who wanted people to become Jewish before becoming Christian and thought people were saved by the Gospel plus the law of Moses.

And in Acts 13, they're outside the church persecuting it. But by the time Galatians is written, they have gotten inside the church and they're influencing it.

And that was why Paul wrote to the churches in Galatia in this book in Galatians.

Next week, we'll look more at verse 6 where Paul says:

**Galatians 1:6 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."**

**Galatians 3:1 "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?"**

**Galatians 4:8-11 "8 Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. 9 But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? 10 You observe days and months and seasons and years! 11 I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain."**

**Galatians 5:1 "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery."**



So you can hear Paul's concern. The hard work he did in leading these people to faith in Jesus and planting this church was being undone. He had sacrificed so much and endured so much hardship to free these people and build a church community that embraced grace, and it was being torn down by false Christians who came in (2:4) to bring them back into slavery.

And this is the worst.

They started out so well, they were really free. But now they were being led astray by the Judaizers and going back to the treadmill. The church was being turned into a gathering of Pharisees who wanted to add human effort to God's grace (Ryken 9).

The thing that gave them freedom and joy was being stolen away by false beliefs. They were running back into a Christian-looking version of the thing that had them on the treadmill before.

We are all prone to spiritual Stockholm Syndrome, where we go back into the captivity of powerless religion, often persuaded by the righteous-seeming teachers who tell us that we must have to do more to get God's grace. There must be something we have to add to what Jesus has done to secure our place with God and one another.

And in Paul's case, there were two main things they wanted to undermine to bring in their false teaching: the authority of Paul and the message of the Gospel.

So Paul doesn't waste time.

First he asserts his authority:

**Galatians 1:1-3 "Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through 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:**

Paul is an apostle.

The greek word "apostolos" means "sent one." And people who had the gift of apostleship were SENT by Jesus Christ, personally.

I believe that all of the biblical evidence points to the fact that there are not apostles today, not in this sense at least, because they were the guys who got things started and spread and wrote the inspired word of God.

There are several passages that indicated that you had to see Jesus in person to be an apostle.

**1 Corinthians 9:1 Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are not you my workmanship in the Lord?**

**Acts 1:21-22 “ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22 beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection.”**

So, however many apostles there were, the last of them died off with the first generation of Christians, because they were the last people who were eyewitnesses of Jesus Christ in the flesh.

But in that first generation of Christians, the apostles traveled and taught and did miracles and produced the inspired writings that we have in the New Testament.

Apostles were a one-time group of people with authority to write the inspired word of God, which doesn't exist today. Why does this matter today?

For a few reasons:

- 1) There is an authority in the apostles that no Christian leaders have today. Pastors are not apostles, we don't have authority over the writings of the apostles, but we are always under them.
- 2) It matters that the apostles had God-given authority because there are many today who say that they like Jesus, they believe in the teachings of Jesus, but they think the apostles like Paul just came along and messed it all up.

“Red-letter Christians” would take the teachings of Jesus as authoritative and more important than the other things in the Bible.

But everything we know about Jesus we learned from apostles. We don't have the writings of Jesus in the New Testament. We don't have any of the direct writings of Jesus. Everything we know about Jesus was conveyed by apostles - the Gospel accounts were written by Matthew and Mark and Luke and John, either apostles or associates of apostles who sourced their material with them.

The whole NT is the teaching of the apostles, including all of the stuff about Jesus.

You can't say that you like the teachings of Jesus but not of the apostles, because Jesus commissioned the apostles specifically to carry his word. And everything we know about the teachings and life and death and resurrection of Jesus, we know from apostles.

There's also no indication that the early church rejected the teaching of the apostles because they were trying to cling to the teachings of Jesus. That dynamic didn't exist.

Paul's back story was that he was a Pharisee who was opposed to Christianity, who ordered the death of Christians. And then when he came to believe and started preaching to the church that already existed, they were surprised. But they weren't surprised because Paul was coming along and messing up Christianity:

**Galatians 1:23 "They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy."**

They didn't say, "We had this really pure faith in Jesus, then the apostle Paul came and messed it up." They said "That guy is suddenly preaching what we believe!"

- 3) This view of the apostles as being a one-time group whose writings stand over the church is also distinction between Protestant and Roman Catholic Theology.

Roman Catholic theology can be attractive because, many assert, the church that gave us the Bible can give us the only true interpretation of the Bible.

But Paul said he didn't get his authority from man, he didn't get it from the church, but from God. It is more accurate to say that the Bible gave us the church. Yes the church affirmed the Bible, but it was the inspired message of scripture that gave rise to faith and the church.

And so when we want the authority and the true faith, we go to the teaching of the Apostles, which we have in scripture. Apostolic authority lies in the text of scripture, not in the institution of the church, not in human teachers today.

So Paul will spend some serious time defending his authority in this book.

Which could look self-serving, if we didn't know the rest of Paul's story. He lost everything to carry this message. He lost his community, his standing, his respect. He was often beaten, stoned, imprisoned. He was mocked, considered the scum of the earth. He had constant drama, always having to fight false teachers. And he had constant concern and care for all of the churches he planted, with their needs keeping him up at night. Paul didn't do this for Paul.

He did this because of what Jesus can do for those who believe in Him.

Again verse 3:

**Galatians 1:3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."**

Jesus died to rescue us from the present evil age.

Jesus provides the one rescue that we all need.

But we, like the Galatians, wander back.

Licentiousness

Legalism

We need to know that Christianity doesn't fit our age. It doesn't fit with legalism. It doesn't fit with the philosophies of our day. Our goal is not to please the religious people, it's not to please the woke, it's not to please the republicans, it doesn't fit with our world.

As a reminder of the Gospel, we will take the Lord's supper.

Assurance of Pardon:

**Luke 15:7** Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who  
repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.