

The Gospel, the Galatians and Us
4 Gospel-Centered Themes
Galatians 1:1-5

There have been a number of vivid word pictures to describe the book of Galatians. One of my yoda's, Tim Keller says, "**Galatians is a little bomb.**" *It's an explosive little letter - because it is about the good news of Jesus Christ.* Paul says elsewhere that the Gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." The Gospel is about Jesus, and Jesus changes lives. And coming to faith in Jesus is not a book to add to your shelf, it's an explosion.

To change the metaphor to *the weather*, **Jerome** said that when he read Paul's letters he could hear **thunder**. In *Galatians*, we can say you can hear a *thunderstorm*.

The Protestant Reformation began in part because of **Martin Luther's** preaching and writing on Galatians. He called Galatians his "**Katie von Bora**" because this letter was as dear as his own wife. Galatians has been called "The Battle Cry of the Reformation."

It is safe to say that when Galatians, the Gospel, has been understood, it has brought *freedom* and *joy* and *awakening* to hearts.

A. Salutation: Verses 1-5

We might have the tendency to just skip over the opening words of an epistle, sort of like flight instructions on a plane. "**I know how to put on my seat belt.**" But that would be a mistake.

Letters in the first century usually began with a salutation that included three parts: the name of the sender, that of the recipient, and a greeting ('Grace to you'). Paul followed this pattern throughout his letters. And he also added something else: a thanksgiving or prayer. The Salutation in Galatians is significant because of what it is lacking, as well as what it is added. **What is lacking is a thanksgiving.** What is **added is a word about the**

origin of his apostleship and a mini-theology of the cross (most extensive theology in a salutation).

This lack of thanksgiving and inclusion of these two parts underscore the central themes of the letter.

- **The Messenger was under attack (Paul)**
- **The Message was under attack (grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone)**

Because of these things... *no thanksgiving!* Only here in Galatians do we see Paul avoiding a thanksgiving. **Even Corinthians could get a thanksgiving!** (Springer was the Pastor). Why? Because what Paul is most passionate about is the gospel – and **when the church loses its grip on the gospel, that is serious business. UK football - fumbling after getting the first down!** False teachers ripped away.

So instead of a thanksgiving we get **verse 6** “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you...”

Welcome to Galatians. We see a man on fire.

- 149 verses brim with passion, sarcasm and righteous indignation. To be sure, there is tenderness, but Paul is intense in this letter.
- In 3:1, “who has bewitched you” or Phillips: “my dear idiots”

So Why Did Paul Write Galatians? To correct a massive problem: A belief in false gospels. From the beginning of the salutation is he addresses the person and work of Jesus.

Oversimplified Outline: (1) Biography (1:1-2:14), (2) Theology (2:15-4:31) (with central them in 2:15-21), and Ethics (5:1-6:18)

A. Who Were the Galatians?

There was an ethnic group of Galatians (North), and a region of Galatia (South). I believe, like many others, that Paul was writing to the region of Galatia, to several local churches, sort of like “the New England Region.”

On Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas evangelized four cities in the Galatia region and started churches there: Antioch of Pisidia, Derbe, Lystra, Iconium. You can read about it in Acts 13-14 (in about AD47). (Some believe Galatians addresses churches in the North. See Tom Schreiner's *Galatians Zondervan Exegetical Commentary* for a good summary of this discussion).

This was probably Paul's first letter written (Around 48AD). After he started these churches, he went back through the town strengthening the disciples. Paul loved these churches, but in short time after he left, they had started to follow false Gospels.

B. Who Were the False Teachers? Judaizers.

Every generation has their challenges to maintain the purity of the gospel. For Paul, he was dealing with what some call Judaizers.

They believed you needed Jesus +something else. They added to the requirements of circumcision and keeping the law.

This happens everywhere today, not the preaching of circumcision, but the idea that you need Jesus plus... this other testament ... plus the Watchtower ... plus Mary Baker Eddy. You need Jesus plus ... speaking in tongues ... plus a particular way of dressing. I've provided a comparison chart...

Judaizers	Paul's Teaching
Undermined Paul's Credibility	True Apostle
Demanded Circumcision as a Condition and keeping the law for salvation	Salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works of the law.
Required observation of Jewish Ceremonies and Ritual	Urged Christians to live in the freedom of grace and life in the Spirit

The Gospel is Jesus + nothing else = everything. If you add to the gospel, you lose the gospel!

Gospel is in a PDF form, not a Microsoft Word. You can't edit it!

- Add to the Gospel: Legalism or a Cult
- Take away from the Gospel's Savior: Liberalism, Pluralism

C. Why Do We Need to Hear Galatians?

Galatians has particular significance for these reasons:

1. We want IDC to be a Gospel-Centered Church. We are a really young church. **We are a week old!** *And what do we want our church to be built on? We want it to be about the Gospel; If you are new, **we are all about Jesus.*** We are not pastor-centered, we are Jesus Centered.
2. We want to see non-Christians fill this room. If you are not a Christian, we are glad you're here, there is nothing better for you to study.
 - This includes people of all backgrounds
 - This includes kids: If you are a kid (where are my kids?) we want you to learn the gospel and believe. You have to believe personally.
 - **I ask Harvey, what they did to grow: simple – people built relationships and they heard the gospel.** I will preach the gospel to non-Christians as clearly as I can. So bring them.
3. If you are a Christian, you should never think you have moved on past your need for the gospel. As many have said "The Gospel is not the **A,B,C's** of Christianity, as many Christians sometimes think. No, it is the **A-Z** of Christianity." All of life has to do with the Gospel. To put it another way, one writer said that not imagine the Gospel as a class, but as the **entire school:** The Gospel changes everything, including the way you treat your wife, handle your finance and deal with anxiety. *A lot of teens don't get excited about the gospel because they don't think they need*

it. There parents have raised them as self-righteous Pharisees. Because thats what the parents are.

Back to the Salutation... I want you to see **four Gospel-Centered themes**. They are like doors to different rooms. We will walk in to each room every week. Two of the four themes, I've already mentioned.

Gospel Theme #1: Divine Authority (1a)

The first theme is **Paul's authority** as an apostle. There were some who were attacking Paul's credibility (ad hominum). Nowhere else does Paul get this **defensive** from the opening sentences of his epistle. His first word is **"not!"** Galatians opens up differently because his apostleship was under attack.

His apostleship is **"not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."** His apostleship was not according to man. It was from the Father, and the risen Christ. **Immediately, the resurrection is in view in Galatians.** Jesus is alive! He appeared to Paul, and commissioned him with the same Gospel as the other apostles.

What is an apostle? "Apostle" simply means "one who is sent"

In classical Greek the term was actually used of a naval expedition ... to send off on a long and arduous mission.

It can be used in a **general sense** (for we have all been sent, see John 13:16, Phil. 2:25, 2 Cor. 8:23) but Paul is *not using it generally here*.

From other texts (like 1 Cor. 15:8-9; 1 Cor. 9:1) we can see that "apostle" in the more **particular sense means one who had (1) seen the risen Christ and (2) had been sent or commissioned by him** (see also Acts 26:16-17, Galatians 1:16). Paul and these apostles were part of an ***unrepeatable band who together with the prophets made up the foundation of the church.*** Ephesians 2:20: "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

- We don't have apostles like the twelve and Paul anymore. We have people who are sent as missionaries, but not like the apostles.
- One of the chief roles of the apostles was to **write the NT**. We don't have those. The New Testament was basically written by the apostles and their associates. If anyone claims to have more Scripture "**tell them they're wack.**"

Apostolic authority is now enshrined in apostolic writings.

- We don't believe "**apostolic succession**" as some religious groups do. Real apostolic succession is passing down the teaching of the apostles (cf., 2 Tim. 2:2). We have a completed canon of Scripture, and we don't add to the apostle's doctrine.
- We repeat and study the apostles teaching. In **Acts 2:42**, **we** see the pattern that we follow, "the devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching"
- What this means is that when we hear Galatians, like the other books of the Bible, we are hearing the very voice of God. We sit under it and receive it as divine truth.

Application:

Everyone listens to someone for truth about spiritual things.
Who do you listen to for spiritual beliefs? There are three main options:

- **Tradition** – Church tradition; or repeated Clichés
- **Speculation** – Made up beliefs; No objective truth; "Believe whatever feels right." **Serial killers have been doing what feels right forever.** If a guy goes in the woods, and has a vision about a new religion, it's NOT okay to believe it. It might **have been a bad burrito**, and he might have felt something, but not something in addition to the apostles' teaching. Speculation also creates division in a church (2 Tim 2:14-ff). Because once you leave Scripture, it's all opinion. There is no common source of authority.

- **Revelation: God's Word**

- God's Word judges our tradition and our experiences.
- God's Word is a gift: this is our rule of faith.
- We must move from speculation to revelation

This is why we study this book at IDC! I don't want you to put *your faith in a man, but in God's Word.*

- **My job is to be the waiter, not the chef.**
- **Does God have the right to tell you what to do? Yes. How does he tell us what to do? In His Word.**

Gospel Theme #2: The Family of God (2)

Paul introduces us to **the theme of the church**, elaborated on in more detail later, by highlighting a few phrases.

What is a Church?

A building? A budget? A cool logo? T-shirts? A sign? A website? No. We are not talking about buildings. We are talking about **community**.

The church didn't have buildings for hundreds of years. Our brothers and sisters gather under trees in Africa, houses in China, for worship.

A. Relationally: The Church is a family that cares for each other.

2a: "and the brothers who are with me" There is a **defensive tone** here. This probably refers to those believers present at the time of Paul's writing. They too believed the same gospel that Paul did. Paul may be alluding to his credibility with this phrase. Others believe what he believes. And in chapter 2, he says he believes what the other apostles do.

But there's also a **relational tone** here. Paul has brothers. Were they biological brothers? No. They were brought into the

family through adoption. Now they are brothers and sisters. “Brothers” (6:1-ff.).

Eyasu and James. Though we don’t look the same, we are brothers and sisters through Christ. (3:28)

Application:

God has met our great need with relationships in the church. Everyone longs for community because they are made in the imago dei. Notice the **Trinitarian language**. Religions that don’t believe in the “**Tri-personal**” God don’t view God as relational. We are made like God who lives in perfect community.

You long for relationships. **No one will say on his or her death bed, “Bring me my diploma. Bring me the newspaper clipping with my picture.”** Life is not about accomplishments; it’s about relationships.

In C.S. Lewis’ Four Loves he describes how he loved spending time with his friends Charles and Ronald (Tolkien). Sadly, Charles died suddenly. As awful as that was to Lewis, he comforted himself by thinking “he could now have *more* of Ronald.” With Charles gone, he could spend more time with Ronald. He was shocked and dismayed to realize that actually the reverse happened. He found in that losing Charles meant that he actually had less of Ronald because there was **part of Ronald that only Charles could bring out!** Lewis said, “**It takes a whole circle of human beings to bring out the real you.**” (Lewis, *Four Loves*, 61).

We will come to know God and ourselves better through relationships. Keller, “**There is no way you will be able to grow spiritually apart from deep involvement in community of other believers.**”

“the brothers are with me.” That’s no small thing. That’s Christianity. It's not about how many commentaries you own or if you have a degree or a fish on your car - it's about people

B. Corporately: The church is local and universal.

Local

2b: “to the churches of Galatia.” Two things: First, Paul expected this letter to be read not just for one local church but for those throughout the region. Second, In verse 2, he uses “church” in the plural sense, referring to **local churches**, local congregations of believers, **who gather for worship anywhere**. What makes a church? Calvin rightly says:

- Calvin: “Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to God’s institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a church of God exists.”

Universal

1:13: But notice how he uses “**church**” in the singular form. This is what we call the “universal church.” “It refers to the whole company of all the redeemed of all ages and places, the body of Christ extended throughout time (George) [Acts 20:28, Eph. 3:20]

Both are important. Both are made up of brothers and sisters. How? The Gospel. The gospel brings us together.

The elders are going to push on you if you are attending to join a growth group, and be a covenant member. Why? We love you. We want you to grow. We believe you need family.

Gospel Theme #3: Amazing Grace (3)

“**grace and peace**” Paul prays that the Father and Son would shower grace upon the church. God is the fountain of grace.

Paul used this greeting in other letters, but *grace is of particular importance to the Galatians* because they were in danger of accepting a gospel that denied the sufficiency of grace.

What makes grace amazing?

- **God's grace is free!** Grace refers to the unmerited goodness of God to sinners.
- **God transforms us by grace.** Newton: I am not what I ought to be .. I am not what I wish to be ... I am not what I hope to be ... Yet, though I am not what I ought to be, nor what I wish to be, nor what I hope to be, I can truly say, I am not what I once was; a slave to sin and Satan; and I can heartily join with the apostle, and acknowledge, "By the grace of God I am what I am."
- **God's grace is faithful grace.** God's grace in the NT has echoes of the OT words for God's chesed, his loyal love. God is "the God of all grace." He is loyal to his people.
- **God's grace brings peace!** The ordering here is probably intentional. This gospel and this peace comes as people proclaim it (See Isaiah 52:7). Notice that it only comes from God and the Son, and by extension, the Holy Spirit. It doesn't come from an angel or another source.

All of life is to be lived *from* grace, *in* grace, and *by* grace.

Too many Christians have their identity shaped by **performance** not grace. Result? **Pride or despair!**

Galatians is a great antidote for recovering Pharisees.
It is tiger that will eat up legalists... religious people who think Christianity is all about rules.

We need to understand grace. Lewis said, "A cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be nearer to hell than a prostitute."

This is because the self-righteous dont understand grace. Look at **Galatians 2:21**. The self-righteous view Jesus and his grace as important but not totally sufficient, whereas the desperate sinner understands "apart from grace, I have no hope."

Gospel Theme #4: Christ Crucified

Paul gives us the core of the Gospel in this salutation. **Stott:** “The Gospel is not preached, if Christ is not preached.”

3 Theological Dimensions of Christ’s Person and Work

A. Historical Dimension, “Christ died” “was raised”

It started in the eternal council of God; then there are promises made in the OT (Gen. 3:15); and promises kept in the NT. The cross and resurrection is the pivotal point in the Bible and all of human history. It brought on a new era, a new hope. In saying that Christ “was raised” we are also noting that there is a new day in which we are living.

Some believe, “it really doesn’t matter if Jesus came in the flesh – what matters is the *idea* of Jesus.” Nonsense. **1 John 4:2**, “by this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God.”

B. Personal Dimension, “for our sins”

That Christ died is a matter of history;
that he died *for our sins*, is the Gospel itself.

Gave himself (sacrificially) “for our sins” (personally) as a substitute.

The Gospel is summed up in four words: “In my place”

• The Essence of Christ’s Death: Substitution “for”

Our need of forgiveness required atonement. That is because of the gravity of our sin and the majesty of God. If we diminish either, we diminish the cross.

“for” – can be understood as “in place of , or on behalf of us.”

Paul expounds on the cross throughout Galatians.

For I have been crucified with Christ; the life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me”

Galatians 2:20

- Insert your name – “he loved _____, gave himself for _____
- It is Jesus + nothing else = everything.

Most of the world does not believe this. They are wrapped up in some works based system. He is different than any other religions teacher who says, “do this, do that” Jesus says – **It’s done!**

- **The Purpose of his Death: Freedom “to deliver us from the present evil age” (4b)**

The Gospel is about rescue mission. The word for “delivered” is a word harkens back to the Exodus. Remember **the Exodus**. God’s people were enslaved, and God in his mercy rescued them. Jesus Christ came to deliver us, he came to bring a new exodus.

Summary: He came to rescue us from:

- Bondage to sin
- Bondage to idols (4:8)
- Fear of Death
- Inability to keep the law
- Condemnation

How do you experience this? Acts 13:38-39

“from the present evil age” -

- The present evil age is this **corrupt world**. He has freed us from penalty of sin **objectively (previous bullets)**. We are not under God’s wrath, we are positionally free,

but subjectively, experientially, we want to go back to our old way of thinking and living. "futility"

We escape present corruption like we escape eternal judgment
: faith in the redeemer.

Looking unto Jesus. Forgiver of the past, power for present
growth, hope for future!

Change comes not from external boundary making, behavioral
therapy, but through Jesus.

C. Vertical Dimension (5) ..

God's Will

A sacrifice (not just for us!) to God, **Eph. 5:2.**

Jesus didn't die as a frustrated man who lost; he died out of
obedience to the Father for the glory of God. It was part of
God's grand design (Acts 2:22-23).

God's Glory

God gives the grace. We get the salvation and peace. God gets
the glory. False gospels, on the other hand, elevate man and
diminish God.

Conclusion

Let me close with a story about the power of the gospel, and
particular the book of Galatians. It's a story about **William
Holland and the beginnings of the Great Awakening** (which
was on both sides of the Atlantic)...

In the late 1730's, a little group led by John and Charles
Wesley, got together and were seeking God. One night it began
to break through, when one in their group, William Holland,
got a hold of Luther's commentary on Galatians. In the
Preface of Galatians, Luther tries to distill Paul's main
argument. Holland brought it to Wesley and said, "Let's read
it to each other." A few of them got together and began to read
it to each other. Holland later said:

Mr. Charles Wesley read the Preface aloud. At the words, 'What, have we then nothing to do? No! nothing but only accept of Him, "Who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption" there came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Savior! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon.'
[Cited from Dallimore, George Whitefield, i, 183.]

After that, what Holland took the Preface and went house to house and said, "Let me read this to you." According to some historians, John Wesley himself was listening to Holland read the preface and he said, "My heart was strangely warmed, and I felt that I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation."

My we see our Savior in this book, and may we spread this message, and may God bring an awakening to the city and the this side of the Atlantic.