

A Gospel Greeting Part 2

Text: Galatians 1:1-5

August 24, 2008

REVIEW:

I. Paul Declares the Divine Authority of his Apostleship (vv. 1-2)

Paul the Apostle

From the very first strokes of his pen, Paul begins by asserting the fact that he is a true apostle, called and commissioned by Christ.

He does this not to protect his ego but in order to defend the Gospel. From the opening verses of this letter, Paul leaves no doubt as to the main subject on his mind, namely the gospel of Christian freedom!

These opening verses, (along with the autobiographical information in chapters 1-2), are not so much a reflection and defense of Paul's apostleship as they are a defense of the gospel of Christian freedom. Thus, Paul gives as it were a "Gospel Greeting."

In this Gospel Greeting, Paul includes the foundational truths that were in danger of being destroyed among the Galatians due to their defection from the Gospel, which Paul had initially proclaimed to them and they had initially received from him (cf., 1:6-9; 3:1-5).

Even more specifically, what was in danger of being perverted and destroyed was the heart of the Gospel, justification by grace through faith in Christ alone, and its resulting freedom and privilege of adoption of sons that it brings.

So, in these opening verses we are immediately confronted with Paul the Apostle and Paul the preacher.

INTRODUCTION:

Paul the Preacher

Paul was many things, an apostle, a missionary, church planter, an organizer, etc... But, Paul was chiefly a preacher of free grace. In a sermon preached for his own ordination, Thomas Foxcroft began,

“Observe what was the apostle’s great work and business: preaching. ‘We preach’ (Col. 1:28), he said...However ignoble, trivial, and minute this work may appear to some, however contemptible this foolishness of preaching may be, yet the great doctor of the Gentiles, a star of the first magnitude, the very chief of the apostles, brought up at the feet of Gamaliel, and having profited above many in all the learning of both Jews and Christians, did not think he was stooping when he gave himself to the ministry of the Word. “Unto me is this grace given that I should preach. For the which also I suffer; nevertheless I am not ashamed, neither count I my life dear to myself, so that I may finish the ministry I have received of the Lord” (cf. 2 Tim. 1:11-12; Acts 20:24). He took all occasions thus to magnify his office, and in all his writings we find interspersed a most pleasant variety of such notes of holy triumph and glorying in his work,” (*The Gospel Ministry*, pp. 1-2).

Paul was a passionate and devoted preacher of free grace. In all his letters, Paul begins with grace and ends with grace. But, here in Galatians, his opening gospel greeting takes on special significance. It struck at the heart of the false gospel espoused by the false teachers.

Martin Luther wrote, “See how he here turns all his words against the own righteousness of man. Are they all nothing but thunder crashes down from heaven against all men’s own righteousness and piety of all kinds?” (quoted in R.C.H. Lenski, *Galatians*, p. 26).

The Gospel of Free Grace

Paul’s announcement of the Gospel, that God justifies the ungodly apart from the works of the Law (cf. Gal. 2:16), was both surprising and wonderful.

F.F. Bruce, in his book, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* writes,

....Paul’s pre-eminent contribution to the world has been his presentation of the good news of free grace- as he himself would have put it (rightly), his re-presentation of

the good news explicit in Jesus' teaching and embodied in his life and work.

The free grace of God which Paul proclaimed is free grace in more senses than one- free in the sense that it is sovereign and unfettered, free in the sense that it is held forth to men and women for their acceptance by faith alone, and free in the sense that it is the source and principle of their liberation from all kinds of inward and spiritual bondage, including their bondage of legalism and the bondage of moral anarchy.

The God whose grace Paul proclaimed is the God who alone does great wonders. He creates the universe from nothing; he calls the dead to life; he justifies the ungodly. This third is the greatest wonder of all: creation and resurrection are consistent with the power of the living and life-giving God, but the justifying of the ungodly is prima facie (at first sight) a contradiction of his character as the righteous God, the Judge of all the earth, who by his own declaration 'will not justify the ungodly' (Exodus 23:7). Yet such is the quality of divine grace that in the very act of extending it to the undeserving God demonstrates 'that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus' (Romans 3:26)," (pp. 18-19).

It is this seemingly apparent contradiction of God's righteous character that makes the Gospel of free grace so scandalous and at the same time so inexpressibly wonderful!

Spurgeon observes,

"I have heard men who hate the doctrines of the cross bring the charge against God-that He saves wicked men and receives to Himself the vilest of the vile. See how this Scripture accepts the charge and plainly states it! By the mouth of His servant Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, He takes to Himself the title of "Him that justifieth the ungodly." He makes those just who are unjust. He forgives those who deserve no favor. Did you think that salvation was for the good and that God's grace was for the pure and holy who are free from sin? Perhaps you think that if you were excellent, then God would reward you. Maybe you have thought that because you are not

worthy there could be no way for you to enjoy His favor. You must be somewhat surprised to read a text like this: "Him that justifieth the ungodly." I do not wonder at your surprise. For, with all my familiarity with the great grace of God, I never cease to wonder at it either." (*All of Grace*, pp. 9-10).

In Galatians, Paul the preacher declares and contends for this scandalous yet wonderful gospel of free grace and freedom.

What was this gospel of free grace? *In these opening verses, Paul gives 6 important affirmations concerning the apostolic content of his Gospel.*

LESSON:

II. Paul Declares the Apostolic Content of His Gospel (vv. 3-5).

To begin with, Paul reveals the authority of the Gospel.

A. THE AUTHORITY OF THE GOSPEL: "NOT FROM MEN NOR THROUGH MAN, BUT THROUGH JESUS CHRIST AND GOD THE FATHER," v. 1

Having fully discussed this point in the previous message, a brief summary is sufficient. As previously pointed out, the issue at stake for Paul was not his ego but rather his message, the Gospel!

Paul's apostleship and his gospel belong together. If the false teachers were correct and Paul was not an apostle, then his message could also be rejected. On the other hand, if Paul was an apostle, then when he spoke, Christ spoke.

Paul's message was to be received as Christ's own words with Christ's authority. Paul's gospel is authoritative truth precisely because his apostleship was of divine origin.

In Galatians 1:11-12, Paul writes, "¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ."

In vv. 1-2, we saw how Paul offered four verifications to support the authenticity of his apostolic authority in order to defend the truthfulness and authority of the gospel.

The primary issue at stake concerning the origin of Paul's apostleship was the authority of the gospel. If Paul's calling and commission as an apostle was of human rather than divine origin, then his gospel was not primary and authoritative.

By establishing the authenticity of his apostleship, Paul establishes for all believers of all time the source of authority for the Christian faith and message.

Therefore, as believers, we can take comfort and find assurance in the fact that the Gospel, which the apostle Paul received and proclaimed and in which we believe is of divine rather than human origin. As Peter reminded his readers,

¹⁹ And we have something more sure, the prophetic word, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, ²⁰ knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. ²¹ For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit," (2 Pet. 1:19-21).

B. THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL: GRACE AND PEACE, V. 3

Paul's greeting followed the customary format of a first century letter. However, there was a significant point of departure.

In first century Greek culture, it was common to use the word, *χαρά* (joy), in one's greeting. However, by adding the words, "grace and peace," Paul created and used a distinctively Christian expression. So all-encompassing was the gospel for Paul, that it even influenced his style of letter writing!

These two words, grace and peace, comprehend all that belongs to Christianity. They contain in themselves a summary of the nature of the Christian Gospel. The Gospel offers both grace and peace.

Each of Paul's letters mentions "grace and peace." He always tailored his greetings to the context and situation in which he was writing. In

light of the problem he is addressing in the Galatian churches, his inclusion of the words, "grace and peace," takes on particular significance.

Chrysostom notes,

"This he always mentions as indispensable, and in this Epistle to the Galatians especially; for since they were in danger of falling from grace he prays that they may recover it again, and since they had come to be at war with God he beseeches God to restore them to the same peace," (*Commentary on Galatians, NPNF, vol. 13, p. 4*).

The false gospel of the Judaizers offered no grace and no peace (cf. 1:3). Rather, it offered bondage and a curse (cf., 1:6-9; Gal. 3:10, 13; 5:1).

Paul contends that if justification comes by a mixture of faith and works, then it is not of grace (cf., Rom. 4:4-5).

The result then is that a conditional gospel cannot give grace or result in peace, because no one can ever be sure if he or she has enough good works to measure up.

Mark this: Sin is not forgiven by fulfilling the law, because no one is able to satisfy the law's requirements.

The law was not given for the forgiveness of sins. The law was given to reveal our sin, accuse and terrify our conscience, increase our guilt and sin, to openly show God's wrath and judgment for our sin and to prepare a man for the eager acceptance of Christ (cf. Gal. 3:24-25).

So, in this simple greeting, Paul confronts, condemns and dispels the Judaizer's false gospel.

The gospel of grace and peace is the only means established by God to take away sin and result in, peace, freedom and the privilege of adoption as sons.

1. *What is grace? v. 3a*

Galatians begins with grace (1:3) continues with grace (1:6, 15; 2:9, 21; 5:4) and ends with grace (6:18).

Grace is fundamental and emphasizes the fundamental burden of this letter. What is grace?

Grace is the undeserved favor of God by which sinners alone are cleansed from sin and guilt and received as adopted sons.

A.W. Tozer writes,

“Grace is the good pleasure of God that inclines Him to bestow benefits upon the undeserving. It is a self-existent principle inherent in the divine nature and appears to us as a self-caused propensity to pity the wretched, spare the guilty, welcome the outcast, and bring into favor those who were before under just disapprobation. Its use to us sinful men is to save us and make us sit together in heavenly places to demonstrate to the ages the exceeding riches of God’s kindness to us in Christ Jesus,” (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 93).

It is important to note that Paul, along with all other NT authors, never disassociates grace from Christ. The riches of justifying grace are God’s unmerited favor in Christ Jesus (cf. Eph. 1:7).

Grace and Christ are always found together in one organic and inseparable whole (cf. vv. 3-4).

Timothy George writes, “For Paul, grace was virtually synonymous with Jesus Christ since he nowhere conceived of it as an impersonal force...Grace is God’s unmerited goodwill freely given and decisively effective in the saving work of Jesus Christ,” (*Galatians*, p. 85).

In a similar fashion, A.W. Tozer wrote, “Grace takes its rise far back in the heart of God, in the awful and incomprehensible abyss of His holy being; but the channel through which it flows out of to men is Jesus Christ, crucified and risen,” (*The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 93).

In the Gospel, we have the unconditional promise that our sins are freely forgiven for Christ’s sake. Grace flows richly to undeserving sinners because of Christ (cf. Gal. 1:4).

Thus, in the Gospel, we do not hear the voice of God calling to us to do our duty, or else! Rather, we hear the gracious voice of a Savior calling and inviting guilty, undeserving sinners to come to Him!

The Gospel doesn't involve law, duty and punishment. It holds forth grace, the undeserved favor of God toward guilty sinners.

And so in the Gospel, we hear God calling:

"¹ Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David... ⁶ "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon," (Isa. 55:1-3, 6-7; cf. Matt. 11:28-30; Rev. 22:17).

This is grace!

2. *What is peace? v. 3b*

Peace is the effect of grace. Grace is fundamental and peace is the result.

Martin Luther writes, "Grace releaseth sin, and peace maketh the conscience quiet. The two fiends that torment us, are sin and conscience. But Christ hath vanquished these two monsters, and trodden them underfoot, both in this world, and that which is to come," (*Galatians*, pp. 5-6).

Peace can never be had until sin is first forgiven. The *modus operandi* (*i.e., mode*) is peace through grace.

The order of this double benefit of the Gospel is captured in the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26, "24 The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace," (emphasis mine).

There are two aspects of peace.

First, peace is objective.

In this regard, peace refers to our status with God. The gospel first and foremost announces peace with God. Consequently, Paul in Romans 5:1 writes, "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Objectively, peace refers to the guilty sinners state of wellbeing and reconciliation with God, which the grace of God brings.

To be at peace with God is to be free from the condemning curse of God's law; to no longer be subject to God as our judge but rather to stand in filial relation to Him as our Father (cf. "Father," v. 1, 3, 4). Through faith in Christ alone, guilty sinners are no longer God's enemies but rather adopted as sons (cf. Gal. 3:26).

J.I. Packer notes,

"The truth which this account ignores (*i.e., thinking only of peace as a feeling of inner tranquility-J.F.*) is that the basic ingredient in God's peace, without which the rest cannot be, is pardon and acceptance into covenant-that is, adoption into God's family. But where this change of relationship with God- out of hostility into friendship, out of wrath into the fullness of love, out of condemnation into justification- is not set forth, the gospel of peace is not truly set forth either. The peace of God is first and foremost peace with God; it is the state of affairs in which God, instead of being against us, is for us," (Knowing God, p. 177).

The reason God can be for us rather than against us is because Jesus "gave Himself for our sins," (cf. 1:4). Thus, Packer concludes,

"The peace of God, then, primarily and fundamentally, is a new relationship of forgiveness and acceptance- and the source from which it flows is propitiation. When Jesus came to His disciples in the upper room at evening on His resurrection day, He said, 'Peace be unto you'; 'and when He had so said, He showed unto them His hands and His side' (John 20:19f.). Why did He do that? Not just to establish His identity, but to remind them of the propitiatory death on the cross whereby He had made peace with His Father for them. Having suffered in their place, as their substitute, to make peace for them, He now

came in His risen power to bring that peace to them. 'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.' It is here, in the recognition that, whereas we are by nature at odds with God, and God with us, Jesus has 'made peace through the blood of His cross' (Colossians 1:20), that true knowledge of the peace of God begins," (*Knowing God*, p. 177).

So, peace is first and foremost objective, it is the peace established by God through Christ by grace alone.

Secondly, peace is subjective.

The objective aspect of peace produces the corresponding subjective realization and experience of this peace.

Subjectively, peace is a condition, the inner conviction that all is well; an internal rest that God gives through His Gospel and Spirit.

This subjective aspect of peace also comes by way of grace. Through the Gospel, God gives rest, ease of conscience for our guilt, quiets our fears for our failures and alleviates our anxiety and doubt of God's favor and goodwill toward us in Christ (cf. Gal. 1:4, "according to the will of our God and Father...").

The Gospel not only has individual implications for anxious, guilt-laden believers, but it also has implications for relationships within the community of believers.

Subsequent to peace with God flows peace with others.

The false gospel that had infiltrated the Galatians churches was disrupting the fellowship and peace of the congregations (cf. Gal. 5:15).

Thus, Paul exhorts the Galatians to live by the Spirit, who is given through the Gospel (cf. Gal. 5:16-26).

Leon Morris, noting both the vertical and horizontal implications of Gospel peace, writes,

"The peace of God meant a great deal to this apostle, drawing attention as it does to the truth that those who trust in Christ are no longer the objects of the divine wrath. As Christ has put away our sins he has made peace

for us, peace with God and peace with our fellows. Paul's use of peace reminds us that sinners are opposed to God and are the objects of his wrath. But Jesus has put away that wrath in bringing about propitiation for our sins (Rom. 3:25). Now we enjoy peace with God and from that there flows peace with people. The believer, trusting God for full salvation, no longer fears to face God and no longer cherishes wrath against other people. Peace flows through the life of those who trust Christ for full salvation," (*Galatians*, p. 36; emphasis mine).

Finally, we observe that the double blessings of grace and peace come "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..." (emphasis mine).

3. *The source of grace and peace, v. 3c*

In referring to both the Father and the Son, Paul attributes the blessings of the Gospel to a single source.

He links the Father and the Son together by means of a single preposition (*ἀπὸ*, "from"), thereby conveying the idea of equality and deity of both the Father and Son.

The point being this: Christ, as God, has a divine fullness and sufficiency to save us (cf. Jn. 1:16). All the blessings of the Gospel flow to us through the fullness of Christ, who gave Himself for our sins (cf., Gal. 1:4).

In Colossians 1:20, Paul says that Jesus, "made *peace* through the blood of His cross..." (*NASB*; emphasis mine).

John in his Gospel describes Jesus as "full of grace and truth," (1:14). And so John writes in v. 17, "For the law was given through Moses; *grace* and truth came through Jesus Christ," (*ESV*, emphasis mine; see also Romans 5:15, 17; Eph. 1:7; 2:7).

When Paul says that "grace and peace" come "from" the Father and Christ, this conveys the idea that grace and peace flow down upon us.

The blessings of the gospel come to us from outside of us and down to us. There is nothing we can do to earn it. There is nothing we can do to rise up to gain it. There is nowhere to look within to find it.

If we are to be made right with God, God must come to us. If we are to possess grace and peace it must come from outside of us. The Gospel emphasizes the fact that God takes the initiative in salvation and comes down to man (cf. Gal. 1:4, "according to the will of our God and Father").

John, in his Gospel writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us..." (John 1:1, 14a).

The ladder that Jacob saw in His dream (cf. Gen. 28) did not originate "from below." Jacob was not given a ladder given so he could climb up to God. Rather, the ladder originated "from above." It was a ladder given by God in which God is shown to come down to man.

In the union of His two natures (i.e., divine and human) God came down to man and raises man up to God (Eph. 2:4-7).

It is Christ, Paul writes, "...who descended..." and "is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things," (Eph. 4:8-10).

How great and fit a Mediator and Redeemer we have in Christ, Immanuel, God with us! Christ, then, is the ladder by which man may ascend up to God.

Grace and peace flow down, as the song says:

Amazing Grace
How sweet the sound
Amazing Love
Now flowing down
From hands and feet
That were nailed to the tree
Grace flows down and covers me

CONCLUSION:

Paul's gospel greeting is a devastating blow to the false gospel that was being taught by the Judaizers.

The false gospel of the Judaizers, justification by works of the law, was wholly incompatible with the gospel of justification by grace through faith alone.

Paul insists that the true Gospel comes from above and originates with God (cf. Gal. 1:4, 11-12).

True religion is *revealed* (Gal. 1:16; Matt. 11:25; 16:17; Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 2:14; Col. 1:26) and *received* by grace (Gal. 1:12).

False religion is *pursued* (Rom. 10:2-3; Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:14; Philip. 3:4-6) and *procured* by merit (Rom. 4:4-5).

The "gospel" of the Judaizers consisted of man's attempts to climb his ladder to reach God (cf. 2:16; 5:2-4).

In contrast, Paul declares that true religion comes by way of revelation from above, through God's initiative in coming to man.

Understanding the nature of the Gospel as grace and peace has a number of radical implications for our daily lives. I will briefly mention two.

1. *Regardless of our failures, we have forgiveness of sins and peace with God.*

This is precisely where we trip up in our walk.
How?

Listen to Martin Luther:

This thing must be diligently marked. The words are easy. But in temptation, it is the hardest thing that can be, to be certainly persuaded in our hearts, that by grace alone (all other means either in heaven or in earth set apart) we have remission of sins, and peace with God.

The world understandeth not this doctrine; and therefore it neither will not can abide it, but condemneth it as heretical and wicked. It boasteth of free-will, of the light of reason, of the powers and qualities of nature, and of good works, as means whereby it could discern and attain grace and peace, that is to say forgiveness of sins and a quiet conscience. But, it is impossible that the conscience should be quiet and joyful, unless it have peace through grace, that is to say through the forgiveness of sins promised in Christ," (*Galatians*, p. 6)

Whenever doubts arise in one's mind because of ongoing failures with sin, one may take great comfort in the Gospel's promise that having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).

2. *Second, grace is given for our justification as well as our sanctification.*

Grace is not only given for our justification (Rom. 3:24), but it is also given again and again throughout our lives.

John 1:16, "And from his fullness we have all received, *grace upon grace,*" (emphasis mine).

Grace is all-encompassing. From the fullness of Christ justified sinners receive one endless flowing stream of grace throughout their entire lives, which constantly frees from sin.

Therefore, we must never forget that even in sanctification, God's grace is the underserved, pardoning favor of God.

Moreover, this fullness of grace includes all the gifts we need in order to build up our spiritual life. Grace is given to us not only to make us right with God but also to empower to walk with Him!

The gospel of free grace is the catalyst by which we are driven to love and delight in God and serve others.

It is the power for our sanctification (Rom. 6:14; Titus 2:11-14) and the source of our consolation in our ongoing battle with sin (Rom. 5:1; 7:24-8:1).

Thus, in all our dealings with God, we must remember grace. Grace is fundamental. Peace is the result. Grace is the first, middle and last moving cause of our salvation. Spurgeon wrote,

"By grace are ye saved" (Ephesians 2:8). Because God is gracious, therefore sinful men are forgiven, converted, purified, and saved. It is not because of anything in them or that ever can be in them that they are saved. It is because of the boundless love, goodness, pity, compassion, mercy, and grace of God. Wait a moment, then, at the wellhead. Behold the pure river of life-giving

water as it proceeds out of the throne of God and of the Lamb! (Revelation 22:1).

What an abyss is the grace of God! Who can measure its breadth? Who can fathom its depth? Like all the rest of the divine attributes, it is infinite. God is full of love, for "God is love" (1 John 4:8). God is full of goodness; the very name "God" is short for "good." Unbounded goodness and love enter into the very essence of the Godhead. It is because "His mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 107:1) that men are not destroyed; because "His compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22) that sinners are brought to Him and forgiven. (*All of Grace*, pp. 43-44)

How are this grace and peace made possible?

It is to this that we turn next.

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