

**A GOSPEL GREETING  
PART 7**

**Text: Galatians 1:1-5**

September 21, 2008

**REVIEW:**

In his greeting, Paul gives 6 important affirmations concerning the apostolic content of his Gospel.

We are currently considering the purpose of the gospel, which is to bring deliverance from this present evil age (v. 4b).

**INTRODUCTION:**

In his commentary on Galatians, John Stott writes, “Christianity is...a rescue religion...Christ died to rescue us,” (p. 18). The Gospel announces that Christ came on a great rescue mission.

Tragically, the Galatians were in the process of turning from it. They were listening to a different gospel (v. 6), which supplemented Christ’s works with their own works. As a result, they were forfeiting their only source of grace and peace (v. 3) and their status before God was coming into question.

For as one Bible teacher notes, “Paul would have them know this his gospel- the free justification of the sinner through Christ crucified- means nothing to those for whom it does not mean everything,” (Wilson, *NTC*, vol. 1, p. 497).

There is no deliverance for those who seek to supplement Christ’s work with their own. Instead, there is only bondage and a curse.

John Calvin writes,

“...by this single word (i.e., evil-J.F.), as by a thunderbolt, he lays low all human pride; for he declares, that, apart from that renewal of the nature which is bestowed by the grace of Christ, there is nothing in us but unmixed wickedness. We are of the world; and, till Christ take us out of it, the world reigns in us, and we live to the world,” (*Galatians*, vol. XXI, pp. 27-28)

And so as we learned last time, Christ came to deliver us from this present evil age.

The nature of Christ’s deliverance involved first of all deliverance from the condemnation and the curse of the law.

a. JUDICIAL: DELIVERANCE FROM THE CONDEMNATION OF SIN

There is a second aspect to the nature of Christ's deliverance as well.

Christ not only rescued us from condemnation but He also delivered us from the captivity and corruption of this present evil world.

b. ETHICAL: DELIVERANCE FROM THE CAPTIVITY AND CORRUPTION OF SIN

The problem with man, as Paul sees it is this:

Man has broken God's law, incurred guilt and condemnation and thus enslaved to the corrupting influences of this "present evil age."

Sin not only brings condemnation but also corruption and captivity from which man stands in need of deliverance.

It is "our sins" that enslave us in this present evil age.

It is important to note that the phrase, "this present evil age" does not refer to this present world as being essentially evil in itself. Rather, this phrase refers to the Godless, passing, satanic world system that has enslaved and corrupted the world since the Fall.

This phrase speaks of the whole of human existence as dominated by sin and totally opposed to "the will of our God and Father, (v. 4c)."

Paul described this present age as evil because it is subject to the devil and the wicked spiritual forces that reign over it (e.g. 1 Cor. 2:6; Eph. 2:2-3; 6:12).

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul writes, "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." (cf. Eph. 6:16; 2 Thess. 3:3; 1 Jn. 2:15-17).

In similar fashion, John, in 1 John 5:19, writes, "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one."

The "rulers" of this present age are utterly opposed to Christ, who is the King of ages! (cf. 1 Tim. 1:17). Because of sin, this present world system is predisposed to legalism and thus fully opposed to the glory of God (v. 5)!

For Paul then, to be enslaved to sin is to be enslaved to demonic powers and this present evil world system (cf. Gal. 3:22; 4:3, 7, 8, 9, 24; 5:1).

All who are in "this present evil age," are obedient slaves to their corrupt sinful nature (Eph. 2:2-4). They are willing participants in the world system (cf., Rom. 1:32). They are held captive in the kingdom of the devil and compelled to serve and obey him.

The tragic reality is that the world is unaware of their need for deliverance. In their self-awareness, they are righteous, (compare Paul's self awareness before and after Christ, Phil. 3:6 & 1 Tim. 1:15).

Yet, however "righteous" men consider themselves to be, their "righteousness," by God's judgment is evil.

As Calvin wrote,

"Whatever delight men may take in their fancied excellence, they are worthless and depraved; not indeed in their own opinion, but in the judgment of our Lord, which is here pronounced by the mouth of Paul..."  
(*Galatians*, vol. XXI, p. 28).

Those in the world are not only self-deceived, but they are also unable and unwilling by their own power to deliver themselves. Those who are born into this world are born in sin (Ps. 51:5) and have nothing but sin and evil to commend.

The Gospel, therefore, announces that Christ came on a rescue mission. The verb, "deliver" has the idea of "rescue from danger" or "to rescue from the power of."

This is the only time Paul uses this verb in reference to the death of Christ. In its other occurrences in the New Testament, it also has the idea of "rescue from danger."

For example, in Acts 7:10 God *rescued* Joseph out of all his afflictions (emphasis mine). In Acts 7:34, God saw the affliction of His people in Egypt, heard their groaning, and came down to *deliver* them, (cf., 12:11; 23:27; emphasis mine).

Through Christ's deliverance and the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. 3:23-4:7), believers have been given freedom (cf. 5:1, 13). Christ died for our sins, which enslave us, so that He might rescue us from the captivity and corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.

Peter, also writing to Christians who were threatened by false teaching from within the church, says that through the Gospel believers have "become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire," (cf., 2 Pet. 1:4).

All who accept the Gospel are delivered from this godless, evil age. Though believers are still in this present evil age, they are no longer slaves to it.

Christ came to deliver man not out of the world but from the evil, which dominates it; from his bondage to sin and moral corruption (cf. John 17:15).

Believers are rescued out of this present evil age of condemnation, curse, corruption and captivity not by being removed from it but by being transferred into another age

characterized by justification, acceptance, blessing, adoption, regeneration, righteousness, etc...! (cf. Col. 1:13)

Christ came, as F.F. Bruce stated, not only to procure “for his people the forgiveness of their past sins...” but also to deliver “them from the realm in which sin is irresistible into the realm where He Himself is Lord,” (*Galatians*, p. 75).

#### CONCLUSION:

Christ’s deliverance has profoundly important implications for our lives. Therefore, as we consider the purpose of Christ’s death, let us first recognize:

1. A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF SIN IS NECESSARY TO HAVE A RIGHT UNDERSTANDING OF CHRIST’S RESCUE MISSION.

J.C. Ryle explains,

“The plain truth is that a right understanding of sin lies at the root of all saving Christianity. Without it such doctrines as justification, conversion, sanctification, are "words and names" which convey no meaning to the mind. The first thing, therefore, that God does when He makes anyone a new creature in Christ is to send light into his heart and show him that he is a guilty sinner. The material creation in Genesis began with "light," and so also does the spiritual creation. God "shines into our hearts" by the work of the Holy Spirit and then spiritual life begins (2 Cor. 4:6). Dim or indistinct views of sin are the origin of most of the errors, heresies and false doctrines of the present day. If a man does not realize the dangerous nature of his soul’s disease, you cannot wonder if he is content with false or imperfect remedies. I believe that one of the chief wants of the contemporary church has been, and is, clearer, fuller teaching about sin,” (J.C. Ryle, *Holiness*, p. 1; cf. J.I. Packer, *God’s Words*, p. 71).

The mission of Christ, announced at His birth, was to deliver from sin! (cf., Matt. 1:21). By His own confession, Jesus said He came to seek and save the lost (Lk. 19:10). Paul says here in Galatians 1:4 that Jesus “gave Himself for our sins.”

Clearly, a correct understanding of the Gospel and Christ requires a correct understanding of sin. Without this, man will not be cognizant of any danger from which he needs rescuing. Christ’s rescue mission will be deemed as nothing more than mere "words and names," which convey no meaning to the mind.

And worse, the gospel and Christ will be distorted and refashioned into “another gospel,” (Gal. 1:6). Thus, J.I. Packer notes,

“...some will assure us that it is a waste of time preaching to modern hearers about the law and sin, for (it is said) such things mean nothing to

them. Instead (it is suggested) we should appeal to the needs which they feel already, and present Christ to them simply as One who gives peace, power, and purpose to the neurotic and frustrated- a super-psychiatrist, in fact...

If we do not preach about sin and God's judgment on it, we cannot present Christ as a Saviour from sin and the wrath of God. And if we are silent about these things, and preach a Christ who saves only from self and the sorrows of this world, we are not preaching the Christ of the Bible. We are, in effect, bearing false witness and preaching a false Christ. Our message is "another gospel, which is not another."

Such preaching may soothe some, but it will help nobody; for a Christ who is not seen and sought as a Saviour from sin will not be found to save from self or from anything else. An imaginary Christ will not bring a real salvation. The minimizing approach leads us to deal in half-truths about salvation; and a half-truth presented as the whole truth is a complete untruth. Thus the minimizing approach threatens to falsify the gospel by emptying it of doctrinal elements that are essential to it." (J.I. Packer, *Puritan Papers, vol. 1, 1956-1959, pp. 256-257*)

As we have seen, the spirit of this present evil age is predisposed to exalting self and minimizing God's law. Thus it ends up distorting and remodeling the Gospel.

Regrettably, the spirit of the age in which we live has led some to minimize the doctrine of sin. Thus, the emphasis is no longer, "Jesus, the Savior, who gave Himself for our sins." Rather, the emphasis has become, "Jesus, the super-psychiatrist, who wants to give me significance, peace, power, and purpose."

David Powlison has rightly characterized this refashioned gospel as "a therapeutic gospel," which maintains "a Jesus-for-Me who meets my individual desires and alleviates my psychological distress," (*Boundless Webzine Magazine, "The Therapeutic Gospel, Part 1,"* <http://www.boundless.org/2005/articles/a0001842.cfm>).

We must recognize that Jesus is not a super-psychiatrist but a Savior. The Gospel is only Good News when it is seen in light of God's holiness and judgment against sin.

If the Gospel message begins with "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life," such a statement minimizes the Gospel. As one Bible teacher remarks, "It reduces the grandeur and glory of the gospel to narcissistic, feel-good therapy." (Lee Irons, *Vintage Moww*, <http://www.upper-register.com/blog/?p=215>).

The gospel is not intended to serve our selfish desires, to simply make us feel better, to boost our self-esteem or to be the answer to our search for significance.

To be sure, unspeakable benefits and blessings accompany the gospel (cf. Gal. 1:3-4; 3:13; 4:5-7; 5:1; Eph. 1:3-14). The very nature of the Gospel is grace and peace (cf., Gal. 1:3). The Gospel calms our fears, quiets our conscience and assures our doubts.

But we must be careful to avoid a “therapeutic gospel,” which helps men merely feel better about themselves or to live better lives. One Bible commentator notes,

“For the Judaizers seemed to him, in their form of the gospel, to be robbing the redemptive work of Christ of its real value. Christ did not die, says Paul, merely to lead men to live better lives in this age: He died to accomplish men’s deliverance, and so enable them to attain to life eternal,” (Duncan, *Galatians*, p. 14).

When the Gospel is minimized by legal means, Jesus is refashioned into a super-psychiatrist or moral example. Jesus died in order to help sinful men merely live better lives, to give peace, power, and purpose to those who are prone to excessive anxiety and emotional distress. When this occurs, it leads to the proclamation of “another Gospel” (v. 6).

The blessings of the Gospel (e.g., grace and peace, v. 3) come only through Christ who gave Himself for our sins. The Gospel is not a message of improvement or therapy but of deliverance and redemption. Jesus is not a super-psychiatrist or self-help therapist. Jesus is a Redeemer and Rescuer from sin!

2. REMEMBER THAT “ACCEPTABLE SINS” CAN BE FAR MORE DANGEROUS THAN “GROSS SINS.”

“This present evil age” is characterized by gross and acceptable sins. Yet, because something of a legal disposition remains in believers while still in “this present evil age,” they are prone to forget this fact.

Our legal-leaning hearts are prone to focus on the “gross” sins such as terrorism, murder, adultery, theft, homosexual parades, abortion clinics, etc...

However, we must also keep in mind the more “acceptable” kinds of sins like gossip, slander, lying, and to be sure self-righteous, moral-living, law keepers. The Leave-It-To-Beaver moralist is just as far from God as the radical, Islamic terrorist!

The Judaizers urged the Galatian Christians to submit to a legalistic doctrine, which had the appearance of acceptability, even godliness (i.e., circumcision; observance of Jewish religious holidays; cf. Col. 2:20-24)!

However, as respectable as these religious observances may have appeared, Paul says that they belong to this present evil age (cf., 4:3, 9).

Before coming to Christ, the Galatians were enslaved to “the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world,” (Gal. 4:9). By turning away from the gospel they received from Paul, the Galatians were returning once again to the cursed, present evil world from which they were delivered (cf., 3:13)! Thus, they were trading their freedom and deliverance for slavery and captivity.

We are not accustomed to thinking of legalism as evil. But, that is exactly what it is! Legalism in all ages is the first and most likely tool made use of to overthrow the gospel!

Anyone who deems himself righteous without Christ is a greater threat to the gospel than those guilty of “gross sins.” Listen to how Martin Luther states this, particularly in the way he describes himself prior to his conversion:

“Paul doth rightly call it the present evil world: for when it is at the best, then is it worst. In the religious, wise, and learned men, the world is at the best, and yet, in very deed in them it is double evil. I overpass those gross vices which are against the second table (i.e., 6th-10th Commandments), as disobedience to parents, to magistrates, adulteries, whoredoms, covetousness, thefts, murders, and maliciousness, wherein the world is altogether drowned, which notwithstanding are light faults if we compare them with the wisdom and righteousness of the wicked, whereby they fight against the first table (i.e., 1st-4th Commandments). This white devil, which forceth men to commit spiritual sins that they may sell them for righteousness, is far more dangerous than the black devil which only enforceth them to commit fleshly sins, which the world acknowledgeth to be sins...the more wise, righteous, and holy that men are without Christ, so much the more hurt they do the gospel. So we also, that were religious men, were doubly wicked in the papacy, before God did lighten us with the knowledge of His gospel,” (*Galatians*, p. 16).

### 3. UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF CHRIST’S DELIVERANCE PROVIDES BELIEVERS WITH HOPE IN THEIR ONGOING CONFLICT WITH SIN.

The conflict, which all Christians face, is this:

Though inwardly we are free from the condemnation and corruption of this present evil world, outwardly we are still in the present evil world. Christ has delivered us from the condemnation and captivity of our sins.

We have come into great and unspeakable freedom through our union with Christ. Where we were once slaves to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world (Gal. 4:9), we are now adopted sons (Gal. 4:5-7) who have God as our Father (Gal. 1:1, 3, 4).

Yet, because we are still in this present evil world, we face ongoing conflict with the world, our flesh and the devil. Because of this, we

continue to sin and sometimes fail miserably. As a result, there are times when it feels like we are slaves rather than free men.

Thus, we wonder, “Am I really free? Have I really been delivered from the condemnation, captivity and corruption of sin? Is God really my Father? Have I really been received into His family? If so, why does it seem like I fail more than I succeed? Why am I more aware of my sin than my Savior?”

It is this precise tension that is the source of our ongoing conflict. What then should our expectations be in regard to this conflict? How does our understanding of the nature of Christ’s deliverance give us hope in the midst of this great struggle?

The Bible divides history into two time periods: “This present age,” (Gal. 1:4; 1 Tim. 6:17; Titus 2:12) and “the age to come,” (cf., Matt. 12:32; Heb. 6:5).

The phrase “this present age,” which Paul uses in Gal. 1:4, refers to the period of time from the Fall of man to the Second Coming of Christ.

The phrase, “the age to come,” refers to the “glory-age” which Christ will usher in through His Second Coming (cf., Rev. 21:1-4).

As Christians, we live in a unique intersection of both “ages.” On the one hand, through Christ’s death, Paul says we have *already* been delivered from “this present evil age,” (Gal. 1:4) and transferred into the new age, “the age to come,” (cf. Col. 1:13 instead of “age,” here it is “domain”).

So, there is a sense in which through Christ’s deliverance we have already begun living the life of the age to come in this present evil age.

The author of Hebrews, in 6:5, says that we “have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come...”

However, because the Second Coming of Christ has not occurred, we have *not yet* been ushered into the age to come.

The Christian then finds himself living in a unique period of time where Christ has *already* inaugurated the “age to come,” but has *not yet* “consummated,” its fulfillment.

We live as it were “*in between the times,*” in the “*already but not yet*” period between Christ’s first coming and Second Coming. Or George notes, “The Christian now lives in profound tension between the No Longer and the Not Yet,” (*Galatians*, p. 87).

Paul in Romans 8:22-24a speaks of this tension which all believers experience,<sup>22</sup> For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.<sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have (*already*) the first

fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly (*not yet*) for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved.”

Why is the “already/but not yet” distinction important to know?

How does it relate to the believer’s ongoing conflict with sin and provide hope?

First, understanding the nature of Christ’s deliverance protects the believer from false, unrealistic expectations of perfection in this life. It guards him from bondage to the “victorious Christian life,” mentality.

Second, it guards the believer from a self-centered, woe-is-me, gloomy defeated mentality.

In either case, the “already/but not yet” understanding of Christ’s deliverance directs the believer’s focus and attention away from himself and onto Christ, who is our deliverance in this age and in the age to come!

One of the most helpful ways Bible teachers have sought to depict the Christian’s ongoing conflict with sin is from the events of WWII.

Sinclair Ferguson explains,

In biblical teaching, the Cross and its attendant events are D-Day, when the decisive conflict has been engaged and won, V-Day is the day to which we look forward when what was settled on D-Day will become a totally fulfilled reality. The Christian possesses the assurance of victory over all his enemies, but none the less faces a situation in which minor skirmishes and mopping-up operations are an integral part of life... The vital truth enshrined in Paul’s teaching is that we have a quite different relationship to sin now that we have entered into the victory of D-Day. But until we arrive at the ultimate destruction of sin on V-Day, we will inevitably be engaged in warfare against it and will find ourselves faced with constant conflicts. It never ceases to be true of the Christian that he approaches Christ with ‘fightings and fears within, without,’ (*The Christian Life*, p. 144).

Through Christ’s death, D-day, the Christian has been delivered, presently, now! This is the victory of the cross! It is a fact (“The aorist tense is effective, it is an actual deliverance,” Lenski, p. 29).

Through Christ’s victorious death on the cross, the Christian dies to the condemnation, corruption and captivity of sin, which is in this world through evil desires.

However, sin itself remains and has not yet been fully removed. Though it may cause a believer to suffer, because God has rescued him from the evil of this present evil age, he is no longer under its power!

Christians live in this world as free men not as slaves!

So, in one sense, as believers we have already been delivered. In another sense we are being delivered. And, still in another sense we are not yet fully delivered until Christ returns and transforms us fully into His image (Philip. 3:20-21).

But, the important point to grasp and keep ever before us in our ongoing daily conflicts is this:

By the Cross, D-Day, we have been delivered from the condemnation and corruption of sin.

This present aspect of salvation is especially crucial in the context of Galatians, as J. Gresham Machen points out,

“This double aspect of salvation- in one sense, future; in another sense, present- runs all through apostolic teaching, and is quite basic in true Christian life of all ages. Here in Galatians it is especially the present aspect of salvation that is in view. ‘You have already been made free from the present evil age,’ Paul says to the Galatians; ‘what folly then it is to return into bondage! Christ died to set you free; will you then do despite to His love by becoming again slaves,’ (*Notes on Galatians*, p. 31).

Since believers are free from this present evil age, it is unthinkable to return to the bondage of law keeping for righteousness! As Paul declares, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery,” (Gal. 5:1).

Because Christ has already delivered believers from the power of this present evil age, it is unnecessary to supplement His perfect deliverance!

Furthermore, because of the cross (i.e., D-Day), we have the assurance that we shall ultimately be delivered from the presence of sin (i.e., V-Day). Because D-Day is a fact, V-Day is assured.

Listen to 1 John 5:4-5, “<sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”

#### 4. TWO WORDS OF CAUTION.

We have been rescued by the free justifying grace of God through faith in Christ and the indwelling work of the Holy Spirit. This is a fact.

*Therefore, we must guard against our ever-present bent toward legalism.*

We must remain diligent to not be drawn back into slavery and bondage (Gal. 5:1). The bondage and curse of the law belongs to this present evil age. Like the Galatians, we face the ever-present temptation to return back to that which we were enslaved before we came to faith in Christ.

In addition, though we have been rescued from this evil age, we are still in it.

*Therefore, we must be careful to not allow our liberty to backslide into sinful license (Gal. 5:16-26).*

Since we are delivered from this present evil age, we are now free to turn from sin, obey, pursue holiness, love God and serve others (Gal. 5-6).

F.F. Bruce observes,

“Here, then, is Paul’s ‘realized eschatology’. Temporally, the age to come, the resurrection age, still lies in the future; spiritually, believers in Christ have here and now been made partakers of it, because they share the risen life of Christ (cf. 2:19f.), who has already entered the resurrection age. They have thus been delivered from the control of the powers which dominate the present age. As 1 Cor. 7:31 puts it, ‘the form of this world...is passing away’, and therefore believers in Christ should manifest a spirit of detachment from it. The indwelling Spirit not only helps them to look forward in confidence to the life of the age to come (cf. 5:5); he enables them to enjoy it even while in mortal body they live in the present age. Thanks to the work of the Spirit, applying to believers the redemption and victory won by Christ, the ‘not yet’ has become for them the ‘already,’ (*Galatians*, p. 76).

This leads us to a fifth and final point. Because of this great deliverance,

5. WE SHOULD PRAISE AND GIVE THANK TO CHRIST OUR RESCUER FOR HIS GREAT DELIVERANCE.

The cross stands as the central focal point of all the ages. The ages past led up to the cross and all subsequent ages look back to the cross as the central focal point in God’s dealings with sinful man (Rev. 5:8-14).

Through His Incarnation, life, death, burial, resurrection and ascension, Christ has inaugurated the age to come in this present evil age.

Man has broken God's law. Therefore, this world is under God's judgment and condemnation. It has become corrupt, defiled and captive to sin.

In sheer grace, Christ willingly came to take our place and die for our sins (Gal. 1:4; 1 Pet. 2:24). Therefore, all who trust in Christ's deliverance are rescued from the condemnation, corruption and captivity of this passing, doomed world.

Where are you? Are you in the place of God's judgment or of salvation in Christ? If so, then thank and praise God for his marvelous deliverance!

Man of Sorrows! what a name  
For the Son of God, who came  
Ruined sinners to reclaim.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Bearing shame and scoffing rude,  
In my place condemned He stood;  
Sealed my pardon with His blood.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Guilty, vile, and helpless we;  
Spotless Lamb of God was He;  
"Full atonement!" can it be?  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

Lifted up was He to die;  
"It is finished!" was His cry;  
Now in Heav'n exalted high.  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

When He comes, our glorious King,  
All His ransomed home to bring,  
Then anew His song we'll sing:  
Hallelujah! What a Savior!

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