

**A GOSPEL GREETING
PART 8**

TEXT: GALATIANS 1:1-5

September 28, 2008

REVIEW:

In his greeting to the Galatians, Paul gives six important affirmations concerning the apostolic content of his Gospel.

Thus far, we have covered how Paul declares his authority and authenticity as an apostle (vv. 1-2, *The Authority of the Gospel*) in order to defend the Gospel of grace and peace (v. 3, *The Nature of the Gospel*), which is made possible through Christ's voluntary and substitutionary death and resurrection (vv. 4a, 1c, *The Vitals of the Gospel*) for the purpose of delivering sinners from this present evil age (v. 4b, *The Purpose of the Gospel*).

INTRODUCTION:

The question to be asked in light of such unspeakable grace and mercy is: To whom does one attribute such a great deliverance, man or God or perhaps a combination of both?

This then brings us to a fourth affirmation of the apostolic content of Paul's Gospel.

LESSON:

D. THE ORIGIN OF THE GOSPEL: THE WILL OF OUR GOD AND FATHER, v. 4C

In order to refute the false gospel of the Judaizers, Paul attributes the source of Christ's great deliverance to God our Father, "...according to the will of our God and Father,..."

He distinguishes His Gospel from the Judaizer's false gospel by rooting Christ's saving work in the heart and mind of God.

1. THE PRIORITY OF GOD'S WILL.

Our salvation, Paul states, is not according to our will. Instead, it originated with God our Father. Calvin refers to this phrase at the end of v. 4 as "the original fountain of grace," (*Galatians*, vol. XXI, p. 28).

As condemned, corrupted and chained sinners, we cannot rescue ourselves! Both the *means* ("who gave Himself," v. 4a) and the *purpose* ("to deliver us from the present evil age," v. 4b) are according to the will of our God and Father.

In comparison, legalism involves man's will and efforts. Ultimately, man's will and works become the determining factor of his justification before God. Yet, Paul will not have this.

Martin Luther writes,

“Here Paul so places and orders every word, that all of them fight against the false apostles for the article of justification. Christ has delivered us from this wicked world. And this He has done according to the will, good pleasure and commandment of the Father. Wherefore, we are not delivered by our own will, or cunning, our own wisdom, or policy, but that God has taken mercy upon us, and has loved us: as it is written in another place: ‘Herein has appeared the love of God towards us, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and has sent His only-begotten son to be the propitiation for our sins.’ (1 John 4:10). Paul is so plentiful, and so vehement in amplifying and extolling the grace of God, that he sharpens and directs every word against the false apostles,” (*Galatians*, p. 17).

In one brief phrase, Paul casts away all confidence in and credit for man's self-righteousness and religious observances.

He unequivocally states that salvation is not according to man's will, as if man can rescue himself from the condemnation, corruption and captivity of his sin.

Rather, he boldly declares from the outset the priority of God's will as the determining factor in salvation. Christ gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age *according to the will of our God and Father!*

Paul, therefore, commends and extols the free, unbounded, sovereign grace and kindness of God the Father in Christ toward sinners!

The priority of God's will in salvation is the consistent and unanimous teaching of Scripture. Salvation from beginning, middle, and end is all of God. Consider,

In Romans 9:16, Paul asserts that man's salvation "...depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." In Romans 11:36, Paul writes, "For *from* Him and *through* Him and *to* Him are *all things*. To him be glory forever. Amen," (emphasis mine).

In Jonah 2:9, Jonah declares, "Salvation is from [*belongs*] the Lord."

In 1 John 4:14, John writes, "...we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world."

In his gospel, John states, "¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God," (John 1:12-13; cf. Eph. 1:3-14)

The whole plan of salvation originates in the will of God the Father. While serving as an assistant youth pastor in a church in Southern California, we once had a guest speaker refer to Christ's redemptive work as God's Plan B or C.

We must not think God's redemptive work in this way. God's plan of salvation through Christ was not an afterthought. It wasn't plan B or C. Nor was God's plan of salvation that which God merely permitted (cf. Acts 2:23). Graeme Goldsworthy notes,

“...John 1:1-3 and Colossians 1:16 tell us that Jesus Christ is the eternal Word of God by which the universe was created. These two passages indicate that his saving work in the world was not an afterthought because of sin, but was the eternal purpose of God. It was the plan of God before creation and from all eternity. Upon this plan God created all things. If we can imagine God drawing up the plans for the universe before he created it, and if we could examine these plans, we would not see Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, but Jesus Christ in the gospel,” (*According to Plan*, p. 60).

Salvation originates in the gracious and sovereign will of God our Father. In the Scriptures, we find that God the Father's will to save sinners is:

- moved by His love (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8; Eph. 2:4);
- guided by His wisdom (Eph. 1:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:24);
- accomplished by His power (1 Cor. 1:24; Eph. 1:19-21);
- administered by His authority (Matt. 28:18; John 17:2);
- and directed to His praise (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14; Rom. 11:36)

Paul's point to the Galatians is that there is no room for man's will or efforts, as one Bible commentator notes, “...Christ's Self-sacrifice, with its gracious and effective purpose, was no human plan, and is in no sense dependent on man's legal obedience,” (Eadie, *Galatians*, p. 17).

There are not two sources of salvation, God's will and man's will. There is only one.

The provision and purpose, the means as well as the end of salvation, originate with God the Father.

2. THE PRIVILEGE OF GOD'S WILL

The one source of this great rescue is rooted in the gracious will of God, who is our Father. In these first five verses, Paul identifies God three times as “Father,” (vv. 1, 3, 4).

Here in v. 4, Paul refers to God as “our God and Father.”

“God” underscores all His greatness and majesty, whereas “Father” underscores all His love and goodness, (Lenski, *Galatians*, p. 30). God is at once to us both almighty God and a faithful Father.

Through Christ, believers have the privilege of a great and majestic God to be in relation to them as “...our Father...”

Paul’s dual reference of “God,” and “Father,” serves as an argument against the legalism of the Galatians.

One commentator observes, “His sovereignty as “God,” and our filial relation to Him as “Father,” ought to keep us from blending our own legal notions (as the Galatians were doing) with His will and plan,” (Jamison, Fausset, Brown, *Galatians*, vol. III, p. 373).

How does this dual reference of “our God and Father” serve to keep believers from mixing their legal works with God’s will and plan?
Paul is highlighting the fact that the Galatians were not merely deviating from a doctrine. They were also in the process of running away from their gracious Father for an abusive Father (v. 6)!

To Paul, such an action is unthinkable! The Father had “willed” the Galatians “rescue plan” in which they would be privileged and He would be honored (v. 5).

However, they were in the process of deserting and dishonoring their kind, gracious loving Father for a different, abusive, condemning father.

They were leaving the family of God, where grace and peace, love and acceptance, belonging and community, freedom and joy reigned for a community of oppression and guilt, condemnation and corruption, captivity and isolation ruled.

So, when Paul speaks of deserting the gospel, we must keep in mind that he is also talking about deserting our heavenly Father (i.e., cutting ourselves off from the essence of the Gospel).

The truth that God the Father desires to enter into a relationship with estranged, disobedient children (cf., Eph. 2:2) is as one Bible teacher states “the essence of the Christian gospel,” (Burke, *Adopted into God’s Family*, p. 196).

In fact, it has been suggested that, “Paul’s gospel is the good news of God’s once for all disclosure of Jesus Christ as his Son, sent for our salvation so that ‘we might receive the adoption as God’s children’ (Gal. 4:4-5),” (Stanton, *Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, p. 183).

Thus, in these opening verses, Paul anticipates in germinal form, his fuller discussion of adoption as sons in Gal. 3:7, 25-4:7).

Being an adopted son of God and having God as our Father is an unspeakable privilege! J.I. Packer calls adoption, “the highest privilege that the gospel offers...” (*Knowing God*, p. 230). John Murray, characterized adoption as “...the apex of redemptive grace and privilege,” (*Collected Works*, vol. 2, p. 233).

Paul highlights at the beginning the great argument of his letter, namely that the goodness of God the Father by grace alone apart from works of the law provides for our salvation through Christ so that we may be free from our state of slavery and receive adoption as sons!

Paul asks, “Did you, Galatians, become sons of God by observing the law or according to the will of God?”

Chrysostom observes, “O ye who were lately slaves, enemies and aliens, what right have ye suddenly acquired to call God your Father? It was not the Law which conferred upon you this relationship; why do ye therefore desert Him who brought you so near to God, and return to your tutor (i.e., the Law-J.F.),” (Commentary on Galatians, p. 4).

Before moving on, one important point concerning the Fatherhood of God needs to be highlighted, which is:

The privilege of having God as one’s Father is reserved only for those who trust in Christ.

This is the consistent teaching of the NT. Paul is clear that entrance into God’s family comes through Christ alone (“...who gave Himself for our sins...”, cf. Gal. 4:4-5).

On the Cross, Christ suffered as an accursed Son so that we might be counted as God’s adopted sons! Only those who through faith have trusted in Christ’s deliverance are adopted into God’s household (cf., Gal. 3:26).

When we think of our adoption as sons and the Fatherhood of God, we must never divorce it from the work of Christ. Again, John Murray writing on adoption, point out,

“This doctrine of adoption is not only important in a positive way as setting forth the apex of redemptive grace and privilege, but it is also important negatively in that it corrects the widespread notion of the universal fatherhood of God and provides against its devastating implications. Though there is a sense in which the universal fatherhood is to may be maintained, yet to confuse this with adoptive fatherhood is to distort and even eviscerate one of the most precious and distinctive elements of the redemptive provision. For if we do not distinguish at this point it means one of two things; the denial of all that is specifically

redemptive in our concept of the divine fatherhood, or the importation into the relation that all men sustain to God by creation all the privileges and prerogatives that adoption entails. On the former alternative God's fatherhood is emptied of all the rich content Scripture attaches to it. On the latter alternative we shall have to espouse universalism and the final restoration of all mankind," (*Collected Works, vol. 2, pp. 233-234*).

This leads us to a third observation regarding God's will in salvation.

3. THE PROPORTION OF GOD'S WILL

In locating the source of our salvation in "our God and Father," Paul highlights the fact that Christ's saving work did not occur apart from but rather in complete proportion (harmony) with the will of the Father.

It was the Father who willed for Christ to die. And, Christ died willingly according to His Father's will. And so God our Father, through Christ's saving work, also participates in our salvation because it was according to His will.

Why is this important for us to know?

The Galatians in minimizing Christ through their legalism also belittled and dishonored the Father.

Moreover, recognizing the harmony of wills between the Father and Son guards us from having wrong thoughts about God as our Father. God the Father is not reluctant, disinclined or unwilling to save sinners. He is no angry ogre sitting in heaven desiring the destruction of sinners!

Rather, Paul says that the redemptive work of Christ was in harmony with the highest and perfect will of God the Father.

Because there is harmony between the Father and Son in our salvation, there is no possibility then of a harsh Father or an unwilling Son.

John Stott writes,

"Both our rescue out of this present evil age and the means by which it has been effected are according to the will of God...Nor are they just according to Christ's will, as if the Father were reluctant. In the cross the will of the Father and the will of the Son were in perfect harmony. We must never imply either that the Son volunteered to do something against the Father's will, or that the Father required the Son to do something against His own will. Paul writes both that the Son 'sacrificed himself'...and that His self-sacrifice was 'according to the will of our God and Father'," (*Galatians, pp. 18-19*).

As already noted, Paul refers to God as “Father” three times in these opening verses (vv. 1, 3, 4). In each instance, Paul closely associates Jesus and God the Father. Both the Father and Son are the source of Paul’s apostleship (v. 1), the source of grace and peace (v. 3), and the source of forgiveness and deliverance from sin and the present evil age (v. 4). Therefore, together, both the Father and Son participate in our salvation.

In 2 Cor. 5:18, Paul writes, “All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself...” So closely related are the Father and Son in salvation, Paul says that God the Father was in Christ reconciling sinners to Himself!

This harmony between the Father and the Son demonstrates that there is no reluctance in either the Father or the Son to save sinners.

It was God our Father who willed our salvation and sent the Son. And, it was the Son who came willingly and “gave Himself for us.” (see extra notes for Part 7).

There is then a proportion of wills between the Father and Son in salvation. The whole plan of salvation is rooted in the one, sovereign, gracious, loving will of God, who is our Father!

Lastly, what purpose does His will bring about?

Leon Morris states that, “God wills something better for his people than an unthinking conformity to the worldliness of the age in which they find themselves,” (p. 37).

What exactly has God willed that is better?

4. THE PURPOSE OF GOD’S WILL

This phrase, “according to the will of our God and Father,” underlines all of v. 4.

The purpose behind God’s will was that Christ should come as a voluntary, substitute and willingly give Himself for our sins on the cross to deliver us from the present evil age.

It is the will of God that sinners be delivered [rescued] from this present evil age. Leon Morris notes, “Christians are not meant to live in bondage to the ideas and the manner of life of those among whom they find themselves. Christ died to deliver them from such bondage. And He did it in full accordance with the will of our God and Father,” (*Galatians*, p. 37).

Further, from the broader context of Galatians, we see that it is also the will of God that through the cross and resurrection of Christ, guilty lawbreakers are justified, declared not guilty but instead declared righteous at the bar of God’s judgment seat.

Thus, God is no longer the sinner’s judge. And, the amazing thing is that God’s will doesn’t just stop at justification.

Christ didn't just give Himself for our sins, justify us and rescue us from this present evil age and then leave us destitute. No!

Paul goes on in his letter to demonstrate that God wills for believers to be adopted into God's family and brought into a close, familial relationship with God as their Father.

Through Christ, God the Father, sought to win back His lost children (cf., Luke 15:11-24). Thus, they are enabled by the Holy Spirit to call God, "Abba, Father," (Gal. 4:6).

It is the will of God that having rescued and justified estranged sinners from an alien family, they can now be adopted as beloved sons into the family of God (Gal. 4:5-7).

And all of this unspeakable privilege is by grace not merit and is rooted in the sovereign will of God our Father.

CONCLUSION:

"Now, that we have seen how Paul originates our salvation in the will of our God and Father, how does this truth affect our lives? What are some of its implications?"

1. HUMILITY IS THE ONLY POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO OUR SALVATION.

Because our salvation is rooted in the good pleasure of our God and Father, it is not according to our will, or merit, or goodness, or deserving.

Thus, all self-boasting and pride is excluded.

Calvin writes, "Christ suffered for us, not because we were worthy, or because anything done by us moved Him to act, but because such was the purpose of God," (Calvin, *Galatians*, p. 28).

2. LEGALISM DISTORTS OUR PERCEPTION OF GOD AS FATHER.

As noted before, a legal spirit makes God the Father out to be a harsh taskmaster; an abusive Father, a cruel and angry judge who is never pleased with His children.

If someone were to ask you, "What is God like?" How would you answer? How should your perception of God as Father be shaped?

How are you to think of your heavenly Father?

Note carefully how Jesus answers Philip in John 14:8-9, "⁸ Philip said to him, 'Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.'⁹ Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

What was Jesus saying? He told Philip that knowledge of Him is the starting point for the true knowledge of the Father.

“Philip, if you want to know what the Father is like look at me!”

Christ came into the world by the Father’s will in order to fulfill His will and thus reveal the Father. It was the Father’s good and gracious will to save sinful men. And, it was through Jesus His Son that the Father’s will was fulfilled. In this way, Jesus definitively and gloriously revealed God the Father (cf. John 1:14, 18; 12:45).

A proper definition and understanding of Christ leads to a proper definition and understanding of God our Father. On the contrary, a false gospel distorts Christ and God the Father.

Since Christ gave Himself for our sins, then neither Christ nor God the Father is a tyrant, judge or angry and abusive Father who will condemn us for our sins.

There is no rejection, no desertion, but only love, a sense of belonging, acceptance, grace and peace, kindness and longsuffering, mercy and joy!

It is the picture we see in Luke 15, where the Prodigal Son, full of anxiety over how his Father will react when he returns says, “I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants,” (v. 19).

And to his joy and amazement, Luke tell us, “²⁰ his Father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him... said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.’²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate,” (Lk. 15:20, 23-24).

This leads to a third implication.

3. THE GREATNESS OF OUR SIN SHOULD NOT CAUSE US TO DESPAIR OF GOD’S GOOD WILL TOWARD US.

In Psalm 30:5, David declares, “For his anger is but for a moment, and His favor is for a lifetime.” How can we be assured that God’s favor is on us and will never cease?

It is precisely because Paul roots our salvation in the will of our God and Father. Because of Christ, we are assured that our Heavenly Father is not reluctant or unwilling to forgive our sins and accept us into His family. Thus, we need not wonder or question His favor toward us.

The great Italian reformer and martyr, Aonio Paleario, seeking to encourage troubled souls trapped in legalism and empty religion wrote,

“Hereby a man may know in what an error they be, who, by reason of some great offence, despair of God’s good-will, imagine that he is not willing to forgive, cover, and pardon all sin, having already punished and chastised all our sins and iniquities in his only-begotten and dear-beloved Son...which everybody enjoyeth that believeth the gospel...,” (*The Benefit of Christ’s Death*, p. 26).

Paul, thus, wipes away all despair, anxiety and doubt concerning the good intention of God our Father to forgive and rescue us from our sin and to adopt us as His sons.

4. GOD THE FATHER’S LOVE COMES TO US BY WAY OF THE CROSS.

The Bible says that, “God is love.” However, to assert that the main attribute of God is love is to empty God’s love of all true significance and meaning.

One cannot begin to understand the true significance of God the Father’s love or the privileges of being adopted as sons of God apart from an understanding of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin.

God’s holiness demanded that sin be punished. God’s love demanded that sinners be saved from their sins. The cross solves this apparent dilemma.

The cross is an expression of God’s wrath toward sin and His determination to punish it. As one Bible teacher noted, “Sin is nowhere seen so terrible, nor the law so inflexible, as in the cross of Christ,” (Murray, *Old Evangelicalism*, p. 110).

What was it that moved God the Father to vindicate His holiness at such a high cost?

It was His love (cf., Jn. 3:16)! The cross, then, is also an expression of God’s love toward sinners.

Thomas Watson, quoting the words of Augustine, writes, “The cross was a pulpit in which Christ preached his love to the world,” (Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, p. 175)

The cross is a stunning expression of God the Father’s love toward sinners and His determination to save them by willing to send His Son to die on the cross as their substitute.

Through the cross, the Love of God the Father and His will to save sinners is clearly made known!

We must always keep before us this truth: *it is only in Christ that God the Father is favorable to us*. This is one of the fundamental truths of our faith.

Paul says in Galatians 1:4, that Christ's giving of Himself for our sins and His rescuing us from the present evil age is according to the will of our God and Father.

Thus, God's love comes to us in the shape of a cross. His love is crucified love! His love is a redeeming, propitiatory love. His favor rests upon us because His wrath was poured out and exhausted on His Son (cf. Rom 3:25; Heb. 2:17; 1 Jn. 2:2; 4:10).

J.I. Packer writes, "The New Testament gives us two yardsticks for measuring God's love. The first is the cross...the second is the gift of sonship," (*Knowing God*, p. 194; cf. Romans 5:8 and 1 John 3:1).

The emphasis on God the Father's love must rest on the Cross.

Thus, Packer writes, "...were I asked to focus the New Testament message in three words, my proposal would be adoption through propitiation...I do not expect to meet a richer or more pregnant summary of the gospel than that," (*Knowing God*, p. 194).

From the outset, Paul declares and underscores the joyful news of God the Father's redeeming love and propitiating mercy. This is the heart of the gospel, adoption through propitiation.

The truth that God the Father has willed to enter into a relationship with estranged, disobedient children (cf., Eph. 2:2) is the essence of the gospel!

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