

"Dear Pharisee..."

Galatians 1:1-5

¹Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: ³ Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)

I told you last week at Easter that I begin today to preach on the Book of Galatians. I actually practiced two times in Ethiopia. I taught the whole Book of Galatians once to Ethiopian pastors and once to Somalis. Paul opens the letter in the normal way that people would open letters in the Ancient Near East. He opens by stating his name, the author's name. He says to whom it is written—the churches at Galatia. Then he gives this standard greeting, "Grace and peace to you." It seems standard. But he leaves something out in this letter that he puts in all the rest of his letters. When Paul writes this letter to the Galatians, he does not say, "I thank God for you." If someone like Paul writes a lot of letters in the New Testament and almost all of them he opens in some way, shape or form saying, "I thank God for you," when he doesn't say, "I thank God for you," it should catch your attention. You think about the church at Corinth that had every manner of problem—sexual deviancy, people leaving their spouses, people who didn't tithe, and all these things, and Paul opens up that letter and says, "I thank God for you." He writes the letter to the Galatians and he doesn't say, "I thank God for you." In fact he's very sharp. Next week we'll look at how he immediately dives in. Paul apparently is very upset and even angry as he writes this letter. He doesn't thank God for them. What in the world could possess Paul to not be thankful for the Galatian Christians? Was it because of who they were? Was there something inherently wrong with Galatia? If you look at the map of modern-day Turkey, Galatia was about in the middle of Turkey. Paul planted churches in the southern part of Galatia – Pisidia (Antioch), Derbe, and Lystra. Was it just something about the Galatians that was inherently bad? The answer is no. What made Paul angry is because the Galatians had the same problem that you and I have. They had become Christians, Paul had planted these churches, and they had become free in the gospel, and now they were starting to become Pharisees. They were starting to become legalists. You can be involved in lascivious sin and that kind of stuff, and Paul will write you a letter and say, "I thank God for you, but you shouldn't do that stuff." If you want to make Paul upset, start saying, "You know, Jesus is good but . . ." "Jesus saved me from my sins, but I need something else." In their case it was to obey the Mosaic Law. Everyone in this room, frankly, is either a Pharisee or you're a recovering Pharisee.

Let me give you a good example of what a Pharisee is, or what a Pharisaical attitude is. When Judy and I moved to Seattle in 1997 to start a church in Capitol Hill the biggest problem, of course, was finding a place to worship, especially in a place that's densely populated and the economy was booming so everything was expensive. And what do you know? Literally across the street from our house was a church that worshiped on Saturday, not Sunday. I thought, "That's beautiful." I went over and asked the Elders, "What do you think about us using your church on Sundays?" They said, "Never. No one's ever used this church for 60 years for anything and we don't plan on starting now." So it's an interesting story. I don't have time for it, but I did some things that actually endeared me to them, believe it or not. They said, "You know what? We'll let you worship in our church." I said, "Great! Do you have a room where we can have coffee between services?" Crickets [meaning so sound or response]. "What do you mean 'coffee between services'?" I said, "We are in Seattle, right? You know what coffee is?" They said, "There is no way we're ever going to let coffee be served in this building." "You're kidding me? We can't even drink coffee in here?" They said, "Never." I had to go back to my old charm box and pull some out and smooze them, and finally I negotiated to the point where they said, "OK. Here's the deal. Tommy, you guys can drink coffee in this church; however, you're not allowed to brew it here because we do not want to be implicated in the sin of coffee brewing." What came out of my mouth, of course, was "Thank you." What was going on in my head was, "You've got to be kidding me." I wanted to say, "How about instant? Where does that fit on the continuum?" That's not in the Bible! Now, here's the thing. If you think avoiding coffee is a good thing and that's what God wants you to do, more power to you. But if you think that God somehow loves you more than He loves me because you avoid coffee, you've missed the point. If you think not drinking and not smoking and all those things are good things to avoid, that's a great thing and it's great for you, but if you think that somehow God loves you more because you do those things, you don't get it. You see, all of us are Pharisees, every one of us. What Pharisees do is build fences. What Pharisees do is begin to think that they're better than other people. Do you think you're better than Democrats because you're a Republican? Do you think

you're better than Republicans because you're a Democrat? Do you think you're better than everybody because you're Independent? I'm just saying . . .

I remember when I interviewed here to become an assistant pastor. I had a great job at Lilly so I could be very honest. "I might as well tell them who I am because, you know." Someone at some point said, "Do you have any particular struggles or weaknesses?" I said, "Honestly, I do. The primary one's regarding church though, are church politics and dealing with Pharisees. I cannot stand Pharisees." I forget exactly how the conversation went, but I said, "Now realize, the fact that I just said I can't stand Pharisees makes me worse than the Pharisees that I hate." As soon as you think that "I'm above them, I'm somehow better than them because of the way they act," then you don't get it. It's the classic Pharisee and the tax collector. Remember, the Pharisee stands up and says, "God, thank you that I am not like him." If you've ever thought that, if you ever feel like that, you're a Pharisee. Pharisees are further away from the kingdom, we read in the New Testament, than the tax collectors and prostitutes are because they have no question that they're bad. But if you're an extra righteous person or a particularly good person, and there are people who are particularly good and moral, remember that even the best of people are not fit for the kingdom of God.

Paul is going to address the Galatians, and this morning you're going to see in this introduction to the Book of Galatians, that Paul actually encapsulates the whole letter. When he says "Amen" at the end of verse 5, if the people understood it he could have stopped writing. Apparently they didn't and so he continued, fortunately for us. The Book of Galatians really is going to deal with two things if you look at it from a 10,000-foot view. One, it's going to be Paul defending his apostolic authority, and the other thing, it's going to be Paul defending and differentiating Christian righteousness from all other kinds of righteousness. Why is Paul going to have to defend his authority and defend his apostleship? The answer's pretty simple. If you've ever watched "CSI" or "Law and Order," there's always a story line at some point about a crooked District Attorney. Everyone really wigs out because if the District Attorney turns out to be crooked, then all of the people he prosecuted will go free on a loophole. So all of the detectives are always squirming around trying to figure out things. It's pretty typical if you want to denigrate the message, to denigrate the character or the credentials of the person bringing the message, correct? That's why most political ads on TV have absolutely nothing to do with policy and everything to do with character and slander. If you can make someone think that a politician is immoral or has bad character, who cares if his policy is good or bad? That's what people apparently were trying to do to Paul. They were trying to say, "Who does Paul think he is? An apostle meant someone who was sent, and an apostle bore the authority of the one who sent him. They would say, "How could Paul call himself an apostle?" There are two main things you need to be an apostle, you need to have seen the risen Lord, ("We were there at the resurrection, I didn't see Paul."), and you need to have been commissioned by Jesus. Paul's going to address them right out of the gate. He's going to address his gospel right out of the gate.

We're going to look at two things this morning. The first thing we're going to look at is Paul's authority. The second thing we're going to look at is Paul's gospel. It's as simple as that. Let's look first at Paul's authority.

¹Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers who are with me, (ESV)

Remember I told you that Paul leaves out something that he usually puts in letters. In this very first verse he adds something that he usually leaves out. In a normal letter Paul would say something like, "Paul, an apostle, and all the brothers." Or, "Paul, an apostle called by God, and all the brothers." Did you notice the first word here? Paul says, "Paul, an apostle – not from men nor through man, but" (remember – get rid of everything that came before it) "through Jesus Christ and God the Father." With the third word that he says here, he's asserting his authority. "I am an apostle, but I'm not an apostle from man and not through man." In other words, "All of the accusations that you have been making toward me," Paul would say, "are absolutely correct. All of your conclusions however are not." Paul says, "I'm not from man." In other words, Paul says, "You got me. I was never in Jerusalem with Peter and James, and they never sent me out. They did eventually, but not when he originally started his ministry. "So you're right. I didn't come from Jerusalem. I didn't have the stamp of approval when I started my ministry. Nor did I come through Jerusalem." In other words, "The original apostles didn't lay hands on me, if you will, and bestow apostleship upon me." We do that now when we ordain someone to ministry. Jesus sends them into ministry through the office of elder, so we invite all the elders up front and they lay hands and through the elder's ministry this person, Joe Tentpeg, is sent into ministry himself. Paul says,

"I didn't come from men and I did not become an apostle through men. But instead I became an apostle from and through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead."

It's interesting that Paul would begin this letter with the resurrection. Remember, last week I told you that the resurrection was as important as the cross. Because what the resurrection says, among other things, is there's a possibility that Paul could have seen him after, but also it says that the work of Jesus is completely finished and satisfying to God. Martin Luther in his commentary on Galatians says that that verse right there is the key to the whole letter (in Romans 4:25 Paul says, "Jesus was raised for our justification."). We are credited with the righteousness of Jesus, and when he was raised, it was credited to us and we now own it. But he says, "I was sent in commission and became an apostle from Jesus and through God." Remember the story of Paul? Paul himself was a Pharisee, so Paul knew how bitter the life of a Pharisee was. He not only was a Pharisee, but he was a Pharisee of Pharisees, and according to the law blameless, he says in Philippians. He went throughout the Ancient Near East persecuting Christians and perhaps killing them, certainly overseeing their murders. On the road to Damascus in Acts chapter 9, remember what happens? Paul is knocked off the horse and Jesus appears to him—the risen Christ—and tells him He will send him to the Gentiles to proclaim His name. God also says as a side note to Ananias (who picked him up) how much he will "suffer for My name."

Just as a side note, ask yourself this question, "When did Paul choose Jesus?" Did you ever ask yourself that? Whenever people say, "I don't believe God initiates with sinners. I don't believe God does all the work." I say, "Tell me then, when did Paul choose Jesus? When did Paul get down on his knees and say 'Jesus, I receive you to be my personal Lord and Savior?'" Never. Instead, Paul is running from Jesus to kill Christians and Jesus knocks him off the horse and says, "You are mine. I am initiating with you. I am embracing you and you will be a minister of mine to the Gentiles. I will show you how much you have to suffer for my name." In other words, Jesus is the One Who always initiates. Jesus is the One who does all the work. We're going to see that not only in these verses but we're going to see it through the whole letter. Paul wants to assert this because God is the One who does everything. The reason that Paul is a minister is not because he is so smart and figured out that Jesus is someone he ought to be following. It's because Jesus decided that Paul was someone that He wanted to embrace, and He did. So Paul's authority comes that way.

What does he have authority to do? He has authority to preach the gospel, and that's the next place he goes. Before he does that, by the way, he adds this phrase, "and all the brothers." Part of the reason people think he did that is to make the point to the Galatians that, "What I'm getting ready to write you is not idiosyncratic. It's not just me. There are a lot of other brothers who believe and endorse what I'm getting ready to tell you. What does he tell them? That's where we go next in Paul's gospel.

³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (ESV)*

How does Paul start when he actually gets into the meat? It's the greeting he gives here, he says, "Grace to you and peace." It's interesting there because if he were just writing to people he knew, if it was a Greek letter he would just open up by saying, "Grace to you," or "Charis." If he's just writing to Hebrew people he might write and just say, "Peace," or "Shalom." Instead he binds them together and says, "Grace and peace to you." It is in grace and peace where the whole gospel is summarized. Grace brings us the forgiveness of sins and peace is the product of our sins being forgiven, that we have peace with God and we have peace with our conscience. Paul says the whole gospel starts with grace and peace, God's unmerited favor and his willingness to forgive your sins, and the peace that ensues from that. Do you have peace with God because your sins have been forgiven? How do you know that you can have grace and peace, or how do you embrace this grace and peace that Paul is telling the Galatians to have? "Grace and peace to you." It's the very next line. Paul explains the gospel. Here is how you get grace and peace: by understanding verse 4.

⁴ *who gave himself (that's the Lord Jesus Christ) for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, (ESV)*

In verse four you have the whole story of redemption in a nutshell. What's the story of redemption? It's just that Jesus gave Himself up for our sins. Why did Jesus have to give Himself up for our sins? Because our sins had separated us from God. And get this: your sins are not only the bad things that you do, your sins are the

good things that you do that you think gain you some kind of standing with God. C. S. Lewis was very fond of saying that, "Your biggest problem is not the bad things you do, but it's your damnable good works." If you're doing good works thinking that they somehow are getting God's favor, you're actually digging yourself into a deeper hole. Yet Jesus came and gave Himself for our sins. I heard a great sermon this week by a guy named Dick Lucas from England on John 3:16. He talked about Nicodemus and how in John 3 what you see is Israel putting forth their very best person they had to offer. If anyone could have gotten into the kingdom by being good it was Nicodemus. He was the teacher of Israel, he was blameless according to the law. He was a faithful Israelite. He comes to Jesus and he talks to Him and says, "Teacher." And before Nicodemus could almost say anything else, Jesus says, "You must be born again." "You, Nicodemus. You, the very best that Israel has to offer. You, good person, you must be born again." Everyone knows the bad person needs to be, but you who think you are the best, you need to be born again. There are great moral people—I've worked with them. But that doesn't mean they know Jesus and it doesn't mean they've entered the kingdom of God. The question is, "Do you know Christ? Has he died for your sins?" Paul says, "He gave himself for our sins."

As I read this text this week for some reason Batman came to mind, "The Dark Knight." Maybe it was because I was also thinking of District Attorneys from the beginning of the sermon "The Dark Knight," Harvey Dent is this great District Attorney. He prosecutes everybody, and he has a horrible accident that not only disfigures him but he becomes Two-Face. It not only disfigures him, but it makes him mentally unstable and he does some crazy things. If people see that he's the one that did the bad things, all the rest of the criminals are going to go free. So what does Batman do? It's pretty amazing. Batman becomes Harvey Dent's sin so that Harvey Dent can become righteous. In other words, Batman takes the blame for all the bad things that Harvey has done so that Harvey's record will be clear. With Harvey's record clear, all the sinners are taken care of. That's what happens in the gospel, Jesus takes on your badness. He takes your record of badness in order that you might have his record of goodness. Do you have that?

Next Paul says, "He delivers us from our sins in order to deliver us from this evil age." Paul's not saying that the world is a bad place at all. Remember in I Timothy he says, "It's all good." The evil age is sort of the spirit of the age. In the Hebrew mindset there really were only two ages. There was the present evil age and there was the age to come. Whenever you read where Jesus says, "I'll give you eternal life," He literally says, "I'll give you the life of the age to come." When you trust Jesus you're not only delivered from the present evil age and the power of the world around you, but you're delivered into eternal life. It starts right now. Paul says, "All of this is yours, and it's according to the will of God the Father." The cross did not catch Jesus by surprise. When Jesus gave Himself over, He didn't say, "Well, what's going to happen if I do this?" From the foundation of the earth according to the will of God the Father, Jesus went to the cross to die for His people. God gave His Son. Jesus gave Himself. What motivates that? It goes back to John 3:16. God gave His Son not because He had to but because He loved the world, and the world in the New Testament is always a bad thing. It's always evil. Because God loved bad people, Jesus died for our sins. That's what he says, "It's according to the will of God the Father." Then in verse five Paul ties it together. Notice what he says.

⁵ *to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. (ESV)*

So Jesus has died for our sins and He has delivered us from the present evil age. Did you notice what wasn't mentioned, not one time in the first five verses of Galatians? Among other things, it was works of the law. Paul didn't say, "Grace and peace to you, all of you who have the ability to be obedient 100% of the time. God love ya." "Grace and peace to you who never do anything wrong." "Grace and peace to you in Galatia who are much better than the Baptists down the street. God loves you." Did you notice in the first few verses in Galatians there's not one mention of anything that we do in order to obtain our salvation? Nothing. Jesus dies for our sins, Jesus gives himself. It's according to the will of God the Father. And because Jesus does all the work, guess who gets all the credit? "God, to whom be all glory." Jesus does all the work in our salvation from beginning to end. God chooses us, Jesus saves us, the Holy Spirit opens our eyes, and because of all of that, God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit get all of the glory. Consider that. If you don't think of anything else, if you don't remember anything else from this sermon or the rest of Galatians, remember this: Jesus plus anything equals nothing. It's so easy to think, "Well I've got Jesus, now if I just had a little bit more of this and a little bit more of that I'd probably be a lot more effective in ministry or a lot better Christian." Jesus plus anything equals nothing. Conversely, Jesus plus nothing equals everything. The question you have to ask yourself first and foremost is, "Do I have Jesus?" Or maybe better, "Does Jesus have me?" Think about that.