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“Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen.” Galatians 1:1-5

I want to begin today a series of sermons that will take us through the book of Galatians. I am not going to rush through the book, and neither am I going to bind myself to preach on Galatians every Sunday, for other topics may commend themselves from time to time. Each sermon will be self-contained so that those who have to miss church for sound and good reasons will not come short in their understanding. On the other hand, there is continuity in the book of Galatians and it would be well if you could make a special effort not to be absent, so that you can begin to gain some understanding of this great book.

The book is well attested to have been written by the Apostle Paul. It is certainly a part of the holy canon of Scripture, inspired by the Holy Spirit, and is most necessary and edifying to the saints in its doctrine and exhortations.

There is also no questions as to the people it is addressed to. They are called the Galatians who lived in what is now Turkey in Asia Minor. The early church was convinced that these were people living in the northern part of the region who were Gauls who had settled there from Europe. The moderns are not so sure, thinking the Galatians referred to were farther south in the region, belonging to an administrative region of the Roman Empire. There are a number of reasons for either view, but we will leave it undecided as it does not materially affect the doctrine or exhortations of the epistle.

The Galatians had been subjected to an attack on the very Gospel of Jesus Christ and they were so affected by this attack that they were in danger of turning away from the Gospel completely. It was most serious error and Paul's language is strong in order for the Galatians to understand the seriousness of their error. The attack upon the Gospel was twofold:

1. It involved an attack upon Paul himself. The false teachers had come from Judea. They pretended that they had been taught by the apostles themselves and that true Christianity was what was practiced in that city. It was there that Jesus had lived and died. It was there that the apostles had begun to teach. Who was Paul, anyway? He was not one of the Twelve. Paul had probably picked a few things from them when he was in Jerusalem and is now teaching things that were not believed or practiced in Jerusalem. How could it be said that what he taught could compare with what was taught by Peter and James and John?

So Paul spends the first part of the letter defending his apostleship. It is necessary for him to do this, because if his authority and commission were called into question, there would be a very different view of the Gospel in the churches. We will have more to say on this subject. Needless to say, it is popular in some areas of so-called scholarship today to denigrate Paul and to say that he changed the Gospel into something different from that which was taught by Jesus and the men from Jerusalem. This is false, and Paul condemned it as false from the beginning.

2. The other attack upon the gospel was by way of ceremonies. The false teachers were saying that you had to keep the ceremonies that were being used at Jerusalem in order to be saved. Jerusalem as the mother church of Christianity was the pattern to which all others must conform. You could not be saved if you were not circumcised and did not keep the law as they did in Jerusalem. After all, Jesus was the Messiah to the Jews and He had come in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and it is unthinkable that Gentiles could be brought in the covenants and promises if they did not keep the ceremonies that were signs and seals of the promises made to Israel. Not to keep these ceremonies would be to deny the promises. Jesus had said that not one jot nor tittle would pass from the law until all was fulfilled, so how could Paul get away with saying that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised and keep the ceremonies of the law? It was a subtle and vicious attack up the heart of the Gospel and Paul could not allow them to be infected with this error without a most faithful defense of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We see that there are two errors associated with the relationship between the teaching of Moses and the prophets and the teaching of Christ and the apostles, including Paul.

1. It is possible to make too much of the difference between the two revelations—that of Moses and that of Christ. This is to cut Messiah off from the OT teachings concerning Christ and leave the tree without roots. Everything becomes up for grabs and Christianity is twisted and corrupted beyond imagination. This was the error of the early Paulicians, Bogomils, and at the time of the Reformation the Anabaptists and other radicals. It continues today in some forms of extreme dispensationalism.
2. It is possible to make too little of the difference between the two revelations, and this was the error confronted by Paul that had infected the church among the Galatians. This error was seen in the false prophets which followed Paul around, the Roman Church of the middle ages, Seventh Day Adventism, and other legalistic attitudes and practices of the modern day.

The safest course is to see that there is both continuity and discontinuity—the continuities lies in the promises and shadows of the Law of Moses, fulfilled in the reality of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit; and the discontinuity seen in the practice of ceremonies, the identity of the covenant community, and the calling and organization of the Gentiles. This is difficult work, but those unwilling to do the work and unwilling to be instructed are sure to fall into error.

As Calvin says, a wrong practice can only be corrected by the application of a sound principle. The ceremonies that the false prophets were advocating were nothing of themselves, but it was deadly that the doctrine of free justification by faith was being denied by the practice of these ceremonies. It is one thing to say that the ceremonies are edifying, it is another thing to say that they are necessary to salvation. If they are edifying, then they may be changed if they no longer become edifying. If they are necessary to salvation, however, it is not possible to change or to modify them in any respect.

Paul was therefore concerned that the principles of Gospel truth be maintained among them, and then they could rightly evaluate the things that they did. Wrong action always is the result of wrong principle. But let us look at the words of the beginning of this great book.

Vs. 1. Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead;) Paul affirms that his apostleship was not from men, but from Jesus Christ Himself. The word apostle had a very clear meaning at that time. An apostle was one commissioned to take a message from an official body, announcing the decisions of that body. It implied representational authority. A mes-

senger from the Senate of Rome, for instance, would be an apostle from that body, sent with a message from that body. Paul is making a claim that his message is not His own, but is from Jesus Christ Himself. Those who speak from God are to be commissioned and ordained to speak for God, and the church has an obligation to see that those who speak in such a way are truly speaking for God and are faithful to the words of God.

Vs. 2. And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia: No authority exists in a vacuum. Paul was not a loose cannon, even if His commission was not from men. He always assembled a team and associated other faithful men in the work of the Gospel.

Vs. 3. Grace *be* to you and peace from God the Father, and *from* our Lord Jesus Christ,

Grace comes before peace. It is because of the grace of God that we have peace with God. In the 60's it was decided that it was a very bad thing to be certain in matters of religion. It was thought that because of this certainty wars were started. The United States was involved in what many young people thought was a unwinnable and an immoral war. It was because of this certainty in matters of religion that men's passions were aroused and the result was war. These young people were certain that they were right. If men just adopted a pragmatic approach to life, we would be able to work out our differences and the result would be peace.

Now I suppose that you are thinking that I am talking about the 1960's and the peace movement associated with the Vietnam War. This is not true. I am speaking about the 1860's and the Civil War. Student radicals such as Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., William James, Charles Sanders Peirce, Chauncy Wright were intrigued by the Kantian idea that truth could come from the melding of opposites, and this would bring peace to the earth. Such ideas are still being bandied about.

The truth is this. There is no peace to the wicked. God is not looking for accommodation with the wicked, but is calling us to repentance and faith. The grace that He extends to us is in Jesus Christ and is set forth clearly in the next verse.

Vs. 4 Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father. This is the heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This explains the grace which is the source of the peace. Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins.

1. We were under that twofold bondage:
  - i. The bondage of guilt inherited from Adam. We were alienated from God and without hope in the world, because of Adam's sin. Because we are the members of an accursed race in Adam, we did not seek God. We are prone by nature to hate both God and our neighbor. Because we are alienated from God we express our religious impulses in folly and self-indulgence, worshipping gods that are appealing to us and gods that seem to meet our felt needs, not the God who created us and knows our true condition. We do not want to know our true condition, but seek out practitioners who make us feel good and comfortable. "Gave himself for our sins" is offensive to us.
  - ii. The bondage of corruption. Because we are alienated from God our nature is corrupt and prone always to all manner of sins, moral, religious, emotional, and intellectual. There is no area of our lives that is not corrupted and perverted by sin.
2. We are therefore in bondage to the world and its evil desires. We do not seek the Lord but seek our pleasures, and the most corrupting of all are our religious pleasures. To seek comfort in religion is most deadly. This is the deadly appeal of ceremonies. Ceremonies can appeal to

the religious sense, can make us feel good. This is their deadly appeal. But a ceremony can never change the heart or make a man new. This comes only by the Spirit of God. This is the reason that ceremonies in faithful churches are not overblown, but great emphasis is upon the preaching of the Gospel and the hearing of faith. It is faith in Jesus Christ that informs the mind and changes the life.

Vs. 5. To whom *be* glory for ever and ever. Amen Paul has set the theme for his great epistle, and we will see it develop in the sermons that will follow. May God bless you. There is more that could be said, but we have mercy upon you because of the heat.