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Galatians 1:1-5

An Introduction to Galatians

In the four gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - we're introduced to a group of people called the Pharisees. If you remember from our recent study through the book of Matthew, or if you've spent much time reading the gospels for yourself, then I'm sure you're familiar with the notorious bunch. The Pharisees were a group of Jews that were very religious in every way; they had a zeal for obeying and upholding the Law and practicing many religious deeds. They claimed to do so to rightly obey and worship God - they thought they could actually uphold God's Law and be righteous. But here's the problem: it was *self-righteousness, pride, and legalism*. They upheld much of the Law with zeal while missing the point completely, doing it for the wrong reasons, or for their own pride and glory rather than for the glory of God in humility. They neglected the whole point of the Law - to love God rightly and love other people, our neighbors - to focus on the minor details, upholding the letter of the Law and not the Spirit. They claimed to be obeying God and upholding His Law, while really they were upholding their own law, their own version of right and wrong. This isn't righteousness at all; it's just a mask, a facade. It's hypocrisy. It's pride. The way of the Pharisee is self-righteousness and legalism, striving to do enough good things, or enough religious things, or avoid doing enough bad things, in order to be considered good and righteous, to be good enough in the eyes of God and earn His favor. The way of the Pharisee, the way of legalism, is living like our righteousness and standing before God depends on what we personally do.

There's a Pharisee, a legalist, inside of all of us. This is the default way of life, the default way of religion in the world: *self-righteousness, self-justification*. The default way that religions in the world work is a system of people doing the right things to be justified before a god or the gods, or at the very least to appease them and earn their favor, based on what we do or don't do. Even among non-religious folks, such as atheists, or the uncertain agnostic, or the friend you know who says he's spiritual but not religious - even they have a desire to be affirmed, to be justified, to be declared in the right. We all have that desire. This is often why people say they don't like organized religion - they see it as an oppressive institution that tells us what to do, makes us feel bad for the choices we make, and judges us. So, people reject religion and moral

authority all together, or by being “spiritual but not religious.” And yet, they are still seeking self-righteousness and self-justification - they’re seeking to justify their lives and actions, so that what they do will be accepted and affirmed. We see this all over the place - people don’t want to be morally judged by religions, they want their choices, actions, and lifestyles to be accepted - they want to be *justified* and declared in the right.

And this is true for all of us. Like I said - there is a Pharisee inside of all of us. We all want to be seen as in the right. None of us like being told we’re wrong. None of us like being criticized, judged, or rejected. We all want to be seen as in the right. We all want our shortcomings to be excused. We all want to be seen as in the clear, or at the very least, better than the next guy, and *surely* not as worse as them! We all strive for *self-righteousness and self-justification*.

But then, we become Christians. We learn that we can’t be good enough, that we’re all sinners, and that none of us can stand as being right in the sight of God; we can’t justify ourselves. We believe the gospel, that Christ came to make us right before GOD, not based on what we do, but based on what He has done - the opposite of legalistic self-righteousness! And so begins the Christian life - a life of recovering from our innate, natural tendency towards legalism, towards pride, self-righteousness, self-reliance, self-justification. We are all recovering Pharisees.

We are still tempted to see our value before God or our Christian walk as based on *what we do and what we earn*. We’re tempted to think that our value in the Kingdom of HEaven or our relationship with God or His pleasure of us is based on how much we do, how much we read our Bibles and pray, how much we give, how little we sin. We who began by trusting in the free grace of CHrist alone are tempted to put ourselves back under the Law. We are all recovering Pharisees, recovering legalistics, who need to constantly be reminded that it is *all about God’s grace*; not about what we do, but about what Christ has done for us!

And we’re not alone in this struggle; this is a problem endemic to all mankind - this was a temptation for the early church as well. IN fact, this was a problem for the churches in Galatia - a region around modern day Turkey - the first churches planted by Paul on his first missionary journey, which we see in *the book of Acts, chapters 13-14*. These were primarily non-Jewish peoples in a country outside of Israel. They had some Jewish people who became Christians in some of these churches, but by and large, these were Gentile areas. Paul and his missionary band

came through and preached the gospel, and people believed in Christ - Jews and Gentiles alike. They were united by their faith in salvation from God by grace in the gospel of Christ alone! But overtime, something happened. Jewish Christians from Jerusalem came and told them that to really be Christians, they had to be good Jews - they preached Jesus plus Law. Legalism. AND the Galatians were buying it! So Paul writes this letter to the churches he loved: the book of Galatians. He writes this letter to them *warning them* against falling away from the gospel and embracing legalism. He writes this letter to hammer home the truth of the gospel: that we are justified not by our own works of the Law or anything we do, but we are justified *by faith in Christ alone!* That's the main message of Galatians; that's why he writes this letter. And that's why *we* need this letter, 2,000 years later - because we, too, are recovering Pharisees, tempted towards Jesus *plus* legalism.

So in our text this morning, we see Paul's introduction to this letter, and also the introduction to several main themes that we'll see throughout the book of Galatians over the coming months. In these first five verses, Paul does what he typically does in all of his letters: he tells us *who the letter is from, who he is writing the letter to*, and gives an opening greeting. But what he writes here is far different from the typical way of opening a letter. Right off the bat, he is preparing the Galatians - and us - to receive the message of this letter. He is answering several questions: 1. First, who is Paul and why does he have the right to correct, even rebuke, the Galatian churches and tell them what to believe? This is a question of *Paul's authority*. 2. Second, what is the message that Paul proclaims? Even more specifically, what is the right gospel that Paul is telling the Galatians (and therefore all Christians) that we must believe? This is a question of *Paul's Message*, or specifically, *Paul's Gospel*. And finally, 3. What is the ultimate reason for this letter, and why does it really matter if we agree with Paul and listen to him or not? This is a question of *Paul's Aim*.

So let's walk through this short passage and see how these three questions are answered, and why it's important for us today.

I. Paul's Authority: The Authoritative Word of God (1:1-2a)

The very beginning of the book of Galatians begins like letters typically do: telling us who it's from and who it's being written to. Verses 1 and 2 begin the letter, saying, "Paul, an apostle - not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia." The letter

is written by Paul and is also being sent by “all the brothers,” that is, fellow Christians, who are with him. And the letter is being sent to “the churches of Galatia.” As I said earlier, these are most likely the churches that Paul planted on his first missionary journey: the churches in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13-14).

So we’re given routine, standard information: who its from, whom its to. But that’s not all Paul writes here; in the middle of verse 1, he breaks from the standard introduction formula and gives us more information about himself. He tells us it’s from “Paul, an apostle” and then continues to explain what he means by this. Now, why does Paul break here and include extra information about himself?

Well, we could say that he’s just explaining who he is, so that they know exactly who is writing the letter. That’s possible, but again: Paul started these churches and led many of these believers to Christ, they know *exactly* who he is. And if this was his goal, he could have just said, “Paul, an Apostle,” but he continues and says, “not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.” In other words, Paul is establishing his *credibility and authority as an Apostle*. He’s establishing, right from the get-go, that he is an Apostle, that he is writing with authority, and that they need to listen to what he has to say in this letter.

Alright, so that means we have to ask, “What is an Apostle?” The word “apostle” can have different meanings in the Bible. The most general usage literally means “one who is sent,” so that a messenger would be called an “apostle” in Greek. But it takes on other more technical meanings in the Bible as well. It can be used in some places to basically refer to missionaries “sent out” from a church to take the gospel ministry to other places. But it came to refer to a specific *office* that bore a special, unique spiritual authority. IN the book of Acts, we see that the Twelve Disciples of Jesus (minus Judas) become the Twelve Apostles, bearing a unique church office and authority. The office of Apostle refers to the Twelve “Apostles” appointed and “sent out” by Christ to hold a special, authoritative role in the history of the Church. Here, Paul is claiming to be this kind of Apostle. He is claiming the same authority and status as the Twelve Apostles, one who has been specially called out, appointed, and sent by Christ to have unique status and authority in the early Church.

Now, this might strike us as a bit odd, for Paul to be talking about the importance of his own office and the weight of his own authority. After all, we might ask, isn’t this bragging, and

isn't boasting wrong and prideful? Boasting is indeed sinful, but that isn't what Paul's doing here. What he is doing is defending this legitimacy of the office and authority Christ has given him so that he can defend the truth of the gospel and lovingly protect the Galatian churches from false teachings - even by sharply by rebuking them, as we'll see him do in the next passage. You see, false teachers had come to the churches in Galatia, peddling a false view of Christianity - that they needed Jesus plus works of the Law, that they needed to become good Jews and live under the Law in order to be Christians, to be saved, and be part of God's people. Paul is writing this letter to refute these ideas and rebuke the Galatians for falling prey to these false teachings. But there's a problem: these false teachers have tried to attack Paul's authority and claim that his message and gospel is illegitimate. They've tried to undermine Paul's authority by telling the Galatian churches to not listen to Paul, who's just a man, and instead listen to the guys from Jerusalem. So, Paul is going to have to present his credentials, if you will; he is explaining why does indeed have the authority to define what the gospel is, and why the Galatians should listen to him. He's going to explain this in greater detail in the second half of chapter one and in chapter 2, but he begins doing this here, in verse 1. He is establishing his authority as an Apostle.

But here's the thing: he's not pointing to *his own authority*; he's not telling us to listen to him because of the inherent authority of Paul. He's pointing instead to the *authority of God, not men*. This is why this isn't boasting; he's telling us to listen to the authority of God. Paul's authority as an Apostle is "not from men nor through man." His authority doesn't come from human beings. It doesn't come from himself - it's not his own authority that he's claiming. It doesn't come from another singular person, or even groups of people or any human institution. It comes from "God the Father. *Nor* did he receive his apostolic authority *through* a man or human being; it's not as if churches declared him an Apostle, or that the other Apostles declared him one. No, *Jesus Christ* Himself is the one who gave Paul this office and authority. Jesus Christ directly spoke to Paul on the Damascus road, and Paul received his office as an Apostle directly *from God and through Jesus Christ the Lord*. Therefore, Paul is sent by Christ to *authoritatively declare God's Word and the gospel of Christ Jesus*.

In other words, Paul is making the explicit claim to be speaking on behalf of God - to be writing under the inspiration and authority of God, as Christ's appointed messenger, an Apostle. He's telling the Galatian believers - and he's telling us today - to listen to the authority of his letter because *it is the very word of God*.

We must submit to the authority of God as our ultimate authority. And we do that by submitting to the authority of God's Word - the Bible. When we read the Bible, we are listening to God speak. Therefore, we must humbly submit ourselves underneath the authority of God's Word in every single area of our lives. God is the the highest authority over all things, not the authority of man. The highest authority in our lives, in our families, and in our churches cannot be men, the traditions of men, or the institutions of men. Our highest authority cannot be ourselves, what we think, or what we like. Our highest authority in the church cannot be the people who've been here the longest, a particular person or group of people, not even a pastor. Nor does it come from an institution of men, like the Southern Baptist Convention. If someone in our church, or even a group of people, want to go against the Bible, we cannot listen to them; we must submit to and obey GOD's Word. If the SBC begins to stray from the Word of God, then we must submit not to human beings ultimately, but to the authority of God.

So we must listen to Paul here because Paul speaks on behalf of God, proclaiming the authoritative Word of God. And what is the message that Paul proclaims? THIS brings us to point number two...

II. Paul's Gospel: God's Grace for Sinners Because of Christ's Cross (1:3-4)

Paul writes in verses 3-4, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of God our Father."

It is very common for Paul to open his letters with the greeting, "Grace to you and peace." This is a play on the traditional way letters began in the ancient Greek world; letters would begin with the word "Greetings" (the Greek word *charein*). The greek word for grace (*charis*) sounds very similar. But this isn't just a play on words - Paul is doing something theologically significant, transforming it into a Christian greeting. He is writing his letter (as he so often does to the churches) because he wants them to remember and receive the grace and peace we have from God in Christ Jesus.

And this is especially true for the book of Galatians, where *grace* at the very heart of the book's message. Indeed, this is true, because *grace* is at the very heart of the gospel message. Often times, Paul just simply says this greeting in his opening introductions, "grace and peace." But here, he makes it explicitly clear that he's talking about the "grace and peace" that come

“from God our Father” in the gospel of “the Lord Jesus Christ.” The idea of *grace* is that of mercy, undeserved merit and favor, a free gift. To be shown grace is to be treated far better than we deserve. It is the *opposite* of getting what we deserve, the *opposite* of getting what we’re due and what’s fair. So what’s assumed here is that *every single one of us* is a sinner in need of grace. Specifically, we need *grace from God!* We cannot be good enough on our own. We cannot earn a right standing before God. The beginning of the Christian message is the reality that we are all sinners who deserve to stand under the condemnation and wrath of the Holy God that we have sinned against. This humbles us, and leaves no room for pride. The gospel cuts away our inner Pharisee, our sense of legalism, our pursuit of self-righteousness, self-justification, and self-reliance. It tells us that we can never be good enough.

And then, the gospel tells us the good news: *that God has lavished His grace upon us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ!* There is grace for sinners like you and me - no matter how wretchedly sinful we are! - because *Jesus Christ* “gave himself for our sins”! Jesus came and lived the perfect life you and I have not lived; wherever you’ve sinned and fallen flat on your face this week, Jesus Christ succeeded and obeyed in perfect righteousness - and this is good news, because he did it *for you, so that you can claim his righteousness as your own, through faith!* That’s the beauty of the gospel! Jesus gave himself up, even to the point of death on the cross, to die for our sins in order to save us from them! Christ died in order to deliver us from our sins and the wrath of God that we deserve. Indeed, to deliver us from “the present evil age” and our slavery to sin, Satan, and death itself. The power of the cross and resurrection is the power of God to save and deliver us, to pour out his mercy and grace upon us, to declare us righteous, to draw us to Himself, to hold us fast, and to bring us home to eternal life with Him! Ultimately, this leads to the peace of eternal life with God in the New Creation; this is what the gospel of Christ accomplishes! Paul will return to this idea at the very end of the book, in chapter 6, verses 14-15.

These words, “grace” and “peace” sum up the gospel message: that we are sinners, who can do nothing to save ourselves from the wrath of God that we deserve; yet though we were his enemies, God shows *grace and mercy* to undeserving sinners like us who simply trust in the sufficient work of Jesus Christ! And God’s grace is what gives us true *peace* - peace with God and peace with one another. We’re going to see this come up again and again throughout the book of Galatians. THE main point of the book is that we are truly justified *not by works of the*

Law or what we do but by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone! But no matter how many times we hear that, we can never grow tired of; nor can we lose sight of how much we need to hear and believe it. Our legalistic hearts are stubborn, and we need the wondrous grace of the gospel to be driven deeply down inside them till we really get it - at our best moments, and at our worst, all we can do is rest in the grace of God in Christ Jesus!

And this means that the grace of GOD in the gospel displays just how *glorious* God is. Which brings us to our final point...

III. Paul's Aim: The Gospel Glorifies God (1:5)

Paul begins this letter with an introduction just like normal - telling us who it's from, who it's to, and pronouncing a blessing as a means of Christians greetings. But when he breaks off into unpacking the gospel that makes this "grace and peace" possible, this "grace and peace" of the gospel that he is writing to tell us about, this leads him to conclude his introduction with a *doxology* in verse 5; in other words, as he briefly sums up the gospel, it can't help himself but erupt in the praise of God's glory! That's what the good news of GOD's grace towards sinners who simply trust in Christ does: it shows us the glory of God!

And this, too, is an antidote that we need to fight against the legalism and self-righteousness that infect and plagues our hearts. YOU see, that legalistic Pharisee inside of us compels us to seek *our own glory*. It tells us that we need to earn our place at the table; that we need to be worthy of God. That we need to justify ourselves, or at least excuse ourselves and be seen as "not that bad." But the gospel humbles us, and strips away our pride. And it shows us that the hero of the story is not you or me - it's Christ Jesus! When we proclaim and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ we are proclaiming the glory of God! The gospel shows just how incredible and amazing God is, that He has mercifully given his own Son to save us; that Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (v.4)! The grace and mercy of God shows us just how glorious and loving He is! And it compels us to worship Him, to stop being so selfish and self-centered, and to instead see that *God is the center of the universe, that Christ is the center of our lives*, not us! The gospel lifts our eyes away from ourselves, away from pursuing our own glory, towards the glory of God! When we realize that we are justified and declared righteous by faith in Christ, not our own works, it compels us to live for the glory of God!

But I think there's also one other way this works to combat the legalism inside our hearts. YOU see, when we're deeply convicted of our sin and guilt, we can start to doubt that this is true. When Satan accuses you in your heart and tells you, "You've really blown it this time. YOU know how wretched of a sinner you are. YOU know how much guilt and shame you deserve. AND you really have the audacity to come before God in prayer right now? To read your bible, or show up at church, after what you've done? DON't you know how much you've dishonored God? DON't you know how displeased He is with you? Are you really going to show up at church and celebrate the gospel and claim that God considers you righteous simply because you're trusting in Jesus?" Brothers and Sisters, that kind of thinking is straight from the Devil. That kind of thinking isn't godly - it's legalism, pride, and self-righteousness speaking. Because the gospel *does glorify and honor God!* SO when Satan accuses you in your heart and speaks these lies to you, the answer is: YES! God *does* want you to come to Him, to pray, know How much He loves you, to come to church and sing songs and celebrate that *you are completely forgiven and righteous before God by faith alone!* No matter how much you've sinned this past week, no matter how much guilt and shame you're bringing in with you this morning, God wants you to *celebrate and truly believe* that you are *justified and righteous* simply through trusting that Jesus Christ gave Himself for you, that His death and resurrection were more than enough to rescue you from your sins and the present evil age! THIS means you don't have to worry that God is displeased with you - if you're trusting in Christ this morning, GOD has poured His grace out on you, you have peace with God in Christ Jesus, He sees you as righteous, He is pleased with you in Christ! And when you believe this gospel, delight in, and celebrate how forgiven you are from your sins, this *honors and glorifies God!* We glorify God by believing, "Despite all my sins, I know the grace of Christ is still sufficient for God to forgive me and declare me righteous."

So let us rest in the glorious grace and peace we have in Christ through faith this morning! And let us respond by worshipping our great and glorious Father and the Lord Jesus Christ!

And if you're not a Christian this morning, this glorious gift of grace is for you, too! Simply stop trying to be good enough, and trust that Christ has been good enough to save you! And then make your faith public through baptism and join a gospel believing church. If you have any questions about this, I'd love to speak with you. Let us pray.