

What is the Gospel?

Galatians 1:1-5 - NCBC, March 12, 2017

Main Point: **The Gospel is God's good news of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.**

- The Gospel Messenger (1-2)
 - God-given Appointment (1a, 15-16)
 - God-given Authority (1b)
 - God-given Affirmation (2a)
 - God-given Audience (2b)
- The Gospel Message (3-4)
 - Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1c)
 - Death of Jesus Christ (4)
 - A willing sacrifice (4a)
 - For our sins (4b)
 - To deliver us (4c)
 - From this present evil age (4d)
 - According to the will of our God (4e)
- The Gospel Motivation (5)
 - God's eternal glory (5)

Application: **Believe and share God's Gospel of grace!** (Communion)

Opening Announcements:

March 19th – First Responders Appreciation Sunday

<<All I have is Christ>>



I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.¹

And so we begin our study of Paul's circulated letter to the young churches in Galatia. For faith in Jesus Christ sets our souls free from bondage to legalism.

I'd invite you to continue your worship now by opening the Scriptures to **Galatians chapter 1**.

¹ Galatians 2:20-21



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, please catch the attention of the ushers now. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

And while you're preparing for our Scripture reading, let me just add my thanksgiving for your generous giving last week to Dr. Soh. Your elders are so thankful for your abundant generosity! Your faith and love caused many hearts to leap in joy and thanksgiving to God. Both in Senegal and in Mackinaw! This Monday night our elders met and we all bowed in humble thanksgiving for what God did through all of you last Sunday. You are a delight to serve. Well done church. Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift!²

² 2 Corinthians 9:15



Two weeks ago we did a helicopter tour of Paul's first missionary journey from his sending church in Antioch of Syria to modern day Turkey, where he and Barnabas planted several churches in the central region of Galatia before returning back – eventually all the way to Jerusalem in 49 AD to attend the Jerusalem council of Acts 15.

The purpose of this meeting in Jerusalem was to answer the all-important question:

What must a person do to be saved?

Some Jews were jealous of the believing Gentiles. Their Jewish culture and tradition was being threatened by these new Gentile believers who also now claimed to be children of God. They believed that a person must become a Jew before they could be saved. Or at least, after they were saved – they should become physically circumcised according to the Jewish law and thereafter live according to the Jewish traditions.

So in Acts 15, after returning from his first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas and other church leaders from Antioch traveled to Jerusalem to help definitely answer this question.

What must a person do to be saved? What is the Gospel?



In **verse 11 of Acts 15**, the council concludes definitively that, *We believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone. Man is not justified by works of the law, but faith in Jesus Christ alone.³

And so after the conclusion of this Jerusalem council, Paul writes this letter to all the young churches in Galatia. For he wants believers to have great clarity on their freedom in Christ. He knows that God's gospel of

freedom by faith alone in Jesus Christ will always be opposed. And he knows there's strong opposition trying to convince the new believers to add human works to their Christianity.

And so he writes a letter known to us today as the letter of Paul to the Galatians.

You can find this text on page **761** of the Bibles we've handed out. Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read Paul's opening address:

Paul, 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.

So reads God's Holy Word. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

If you compare the verses we've just read to the opening verses of Paul's other epistles or letters to the churches you'll notice a glaring omission at the start of Galatians.

The pattern of most of Paul's letters follows the same format –

³ Galatians 2:16

Paul's Opening Pattern:

- Introduces **himself**
- Identifies **his audience**
- Blesses with **grace and peace**
- Expresses **thanks for them**

he introduces himself, identifies who he is writing to, blesses them with grace and peace – often with some form of doxology and praise for God's work, and then expresses his sincere thanksgiving for those he is writing to.

So what's missing from Galatians?

Verse 1 – Paul introduces himself. **Verse 2** – Paul identifies his audience. **Verses 3-5** Paul extends his blessing of grace and peace – with a doxology that celebrates the essence of the Gospel.

And then, **verse 6**,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

This is a rebuke. No thanksgiving. Paul is upset, and the start of this letter makes the point.

The Galatian believers are unnecessarily submitting themselves again to a yoke of bondage – adding their own works to the free grace of Christ – and thereby negating the grace of God.

Paul's writing is terse and urgent. The Galatian churches were distorting the very Gospel of God – **verse 7**.

What about you? Do you have a clear understanding of what you must do to be saved from your sins?

Church - we can't afford to misunderstand the Gospel. And just like the Galatians – we're tempted to define God's plan of salvation more by our culture than by Scripture.

For example, have you ever heard the statement, "God helps those who help themselves"?

Well, that's not biblically true.⁴ That's a different gospel! Christ died for the weak and the helpless – not the strong.⁵

Or what about "Cleanliness is next to godliness." Again – false truth. **Matthew 7** teaches that God is much more concerned about the sin in our hearts than the dirt on our hands.⁶

But – if you're like me, sometimes we functionally start to fall back into believing that our external or outward

⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/God-help-themselves.html>

⁵ Isaiah 25:4; Romans 5:6-8

⁶ Matthew 7:18-23

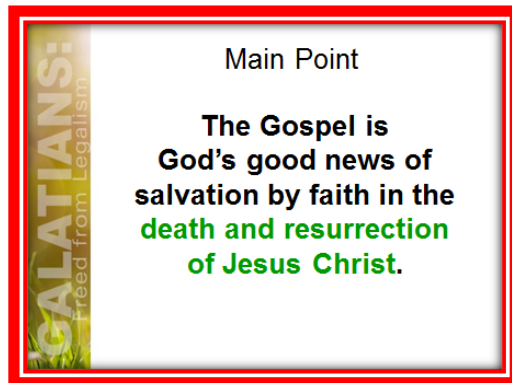
appearance, attendance, and actions are the basis for how God treats us. And as long as we have prayed the right prayer, and are faithful at church, and don't drink or dance, or cuss, or hang out with people who do – then we are God's children on our way to heaven.

If we believe this – we have become deceived. Your good works can never merit any rescue from God's judgment against your sin.

So with an urgent and terse energy, Paul begins this letter.

And it is my prayer this morning that by the time we leave today every one of us would clearly understand and be able to communicate the true Gospel of God.

We could summarize Paul's point this way,



The Gospel is God's good news of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Literally the word Gospel, means “good news.” So the Gospel is God's good news. The good news of how we can be saved from the power and penalty of our sin.

The Gospel is God's good news of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We are saved simply by believing that God's grace is powerful enough to forgive us and make us new because of the death and resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ in our place.

Do you believe that this morning? If so, you are free. Free from slavery to living by rules and regulations which oppress and hinder true joy and love.

So let's dive into our text, as Paul first defends,



The Gospel Messenger (1-2)

Paul starts by immediately defending his apostleship – not because he's so concerned about his personal reputation, but he's concerned about the purity of the Gospel. Paul understands the false teachers are trying

to discredit the messenger in order to undermine the message. Paul realized he must defend his authority and authenticity as a true messenger of God's gospel if he was to turn the Galatian churches from going back to the empty oppression of legalistic religion.

So he writes,

Paul – an apostle. He's reminding the churches of his,

The Gospel Messenger (1-2)

- God-given **Appointment** (1a, 15-16)

God-given Appointment (1a, 15-16)

Generally the word “apostle” just means messenger. But *technically* for the early church, **Acts 1:22** indicates that an apostle was an eye-witness to Christ's resurrection.

Look down at **verses 15-16** where Paul describes his God-given appointment as an apostle in more detail:

But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone...

Now consider carefully – when did God reveal the resurrected Christ to Paul? **Acts 9** right? On the Damascus road. Paul is reminding the Galatians that Christ appeared to him – last of all the apostles, after he had been persecuting the very faith that he now proclaims.⁷

So he wasn't made an apostle *by man or through man – but through Jesus Christ and God the Father*

As an eye-witness of Christ's resurrection, he had

The Gospel Messenger (1-2)

- God-given **Appointment** (1a, 15-16)
- God-given **Authority** (1b)

God-given Authority (1b)

No other people or church council was the source of his spiritual authority. He was sent to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles by God Himself.

Yes, his sending church at Antioch in Syria had laid hands on him, prayed over him, and sent him out to

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:4-9

reach the Gentiles. But his sending church merely recognized and affirmed the God-given authority that the Spirit had given to Paul for this ministry.

That's why in verse 2 he says,

And all the brothers who are with me,

Paul is a gospel messenger who has,

The Gospel Messenger (1-2)

- God-given **Appointment** (1a, 15-16)
- God-given **Authority** (1b)
- God-given **Affirmation** (2a)

God-given Affirmation (2a)

The brothers from Jerusalem and the church at Antioch and perhaps elsewhere where all in agreement with Paul's spiritual authority and message. Paul had a right to speak about the Gospel that they were departing from – for he had a God-given appointment, authority, affirmation, and a

The Gospel Messenger (1-2)

- God-given **Appointment** (1a, 15-16)
- God-given **Authority** (1b)
- God-given **Affirmation** (2a)
- God-given **Audience** (2b)

God-given Audience (2b)

To the churches at Galatia. It was the Holy Spirit that sent Paul to preach the Gospel to the people in Lystra, and Derbe, and Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia.

Therefore Paul's message is God's own message about salvation from sin. The Gospel Messenger has real God-given authority to proclaim,

The Gospel Message (3-4)

The Gospel Message (3-4)

And I find it so fascinating that the first truth of the Gospel that Paul emphasizes right out of the gate is the,

The Gospel Message (3-4)

- **Resurrection** of Jesus Christ (1c)

Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1c)

You will find the phrase at the end of verse 1,

God the Father, who raised Him from the dead

Now notice Paul mentions the resurrection here before he mentions Christ's death on the cross. In other places like **1 Corinthians 15** Paul recounts the gospel starting with Christ's death.⁸ Why might he be presenting this Gospel truth out of chronological sequence?

In the context, he had just defended his commission as an apostle – as an eye-witness to the resurrected Messiah. For Paul himself, he came to know Christ first through His resurrection, and then of His substitutionary death.⁹

⁸ 1 Corinthians 15:4-5ff

⁹ Acts 9:5

This is a core truth of God's gospel. God raised Jesus from the dead. Rejoice church! This is the good news of how we can be saved from our sins! He who once was dead is now alive!

I want to make sure you know this. So turn to your neighbor this morning and tell them that "Jesus is alive."

That's right! To be saved and rescued from your sins you must believe this truth. Jesus is alive!

If Jesus would not have rose again from the dead, then we could not have new life. We could have no freedom from sin's slavery. The empty tomb proves that Christ was a victor over sin and death – and that all who believe in Him have been set free from sin's power and curse!

But by itself, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not the full gospel. For the resurrection of Jesus didn't take away our sins. Our sins could only be taken away by the,

The Gospel Message (3-4)

- **Resurrection** of Jesus Christ (1c)
- **Death** of Jesus Christ (4)

Death of Jesus Christ (4)

Start reading at the end of **verse 3**,

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...

Verse 4 completes what we need to know about God's good news of what we must do to be saved. Let's look carefully at every part of what Paul is teaching here.

First he says that *Jesus Christ gave Himself*.

In other words, God's Son became



A willing sacrifice (4a) for you and me.

Jesus died for you – in your place. Voluntarily substituting himself and submitting himself to the ugly death that your sins deserved.

Because that's the next phrase in **verse 4**, isn't it?

He gave himself...



For our sins (4b)

Ever since the garden of Eden, God has been clear that sin will always bring death. For sure sin never tells you that. It promises a life and joy that it can never deliver. But the wages of sin is death.¹⁰ The result of sin is separation from God – eternally. The only way that our sins can be absolved is if someone without any sin would die in our place to completely pay for all the death penalty that our sins have earned.

And here's the good news of God's salvation. Jesus Christ – God's own Son – willingly sacrificed Himself and died the death we deserved to die for our sins!

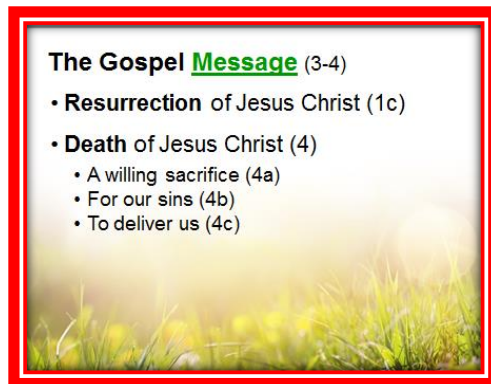
Turn to your neighbor and share this good news – "Jesus died for your sins!" Believe this and you shall be saved dear friends.

But there's more! Keep reading in the text, and let your

¹⁰ Romans 3:23

soul swell with thanksgiving and praise and worship to our God of all grace and peace!

Verse 4 says *He gave himself for our sins ...*



To deliver us (4c)

A synonym would be to rescue us. Before we were saved and born again by the Spirit of the Living God, we were imprisoned and enslaved to sin, right? We tried to stop sinning – only to just slide into a different ditch of sin – or to finally succumb to continuing the very sin that we hated.

Listen up friends. Jesus' death and resurrection delivers us from sin's penalty and sin's power. You no longer have to live in sin. Christ died to set you free! Free to live according to God's creative purpose for your life – for His glory and praise! Boast therefore in the good news of the cross of Jesus Christ – for at the cross – He delivered you from ... how does the verse say it?...

He delivered us...



From this present evil age (4d)

Now he's not taking about time here. This "present evil age" is speaking of the satanic world system, and the way of thinking and living apart from God that characterizes the wickedness of this world.

Jesus died to deliver or rescue you from a Godless life that is dominated by sin and its ever increasing whims.

And why did Jesus do all of this for you? Because you are so lovely? Because you're so good?

No. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners, and the end of verse 4 clarifies for this was,



The Gospel Message (3-4)

- **Resurrection** of Jesus Christ (1c)
- **Death** of Jesus Christ (4)
 - A willing sacrifice (4a)
 - For our sins (4b)
 - To deliver us (4c)
 - From this present evil age (4d)
 - According to the will of our God (4e)

According to the will of our God (4e) and Father

It really has nothing to do with you. All you bring to your salvation is your sins. It was our God of grace and peace who determined to crush His Son – so that by His stripes we might be healed.

This is the Gospel message! And it is very good news dear friends.

Jesus Christ died and rose again to deliver you from sin's penalty and power!

Do you believe this today?

To be saved and rescued from your sins you must only believe the Scriptures, and receive the grace and peace that comes from God by faith alone.

You cannot be good enough to put God in your debt. You will notice that not once in these verses do we see something that we must do. Because salvation is a work of God, and...



The Gospel Motivation (5)

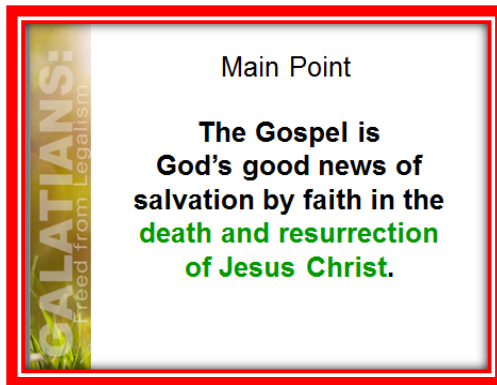
- God's eternal **glory** (5)

The Gospel Motivation is God's eternal glory (5) above all.

Verse 5 makes it clear – *to God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Your salvation is ultimately to put God and His grace on display. Your joy and peace in believing in Christ is all about the eternal praise and worship of God forever and ever. Your freedom from sin here and now has eternal ramifications!

I desperately want every one of us to be clear on this point this morning.



The gospel is God's good news of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul can give such a blessing of grace and peace. For God's grace is the source of such salvation, and God's peace is the result.

But only for those who believe. It's not a salvation by human works. This is a salvation by faith alone in the finished work of Jesus Christ through His substitutionary death and resurrection on your behalf.

Now I'm not an apostle like Paul – but God's Spirit has called me to preach this Gospel to you today. So I urge you today to,



Believe and share God's Gospel of grace!

Repent of practicing a salvation by human accomplishment. Repent from trusting your actions, or your appearance, or your affirmations from others for your salvation. Turn your eyes upon Jesus – look away from your culture and your good deeds which cannot save. Believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient to rescue and deliver you from sin's penalty and power!

This morning we are going to celebrate God's gospel of grace by remembering what Jesus did to grant us such freedom and peace.

So as our servers to come forward and prepare to serve us with the communion elements, I'd invite you to quiet your heart and thank God for all that He has done to secure your salvation from sin. Confess your faith in Christ alone for your salvation. And if there is any sin that you have again submitted to – if there's any bitterness or resentment that you've allowed to fester in your heart towards another one of your brothers and

sisters in Christ – today’s a day for joyful repentance and confession.

Let’s get clean church! There’s nothing that will hinder the work of God’s Spirit in our midst more than if we regard iniquity in our hearts.¹¹ Sin lies. Greed, bitterness, anger, and idolatry will never satisfy your soul.

So come clean. God’s grace is so free that our pride despises it. But just confess your sin, and ask God to forgive you. Believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is sufficient to cleanse and pardon your sins.

And then let’s celebrate with joy as we remember Christ’s death together now.

If you do not believe in Jesus Christ for the salvation of your sins, we would invite you to just simply observe us as we participate in this symbolic ceremony of our common-union with Christ. For there’s nothing spiritual about this juice or these crackers. They just represent and remind us of Christ’s blood and body.

So there’s no advantage of participating together in the symbol if you aren’t first participating together with us in God’s amazing grace that saves, sanctifies, and helps us look forward to the coming glory of our God and Savior.

As you receive the bread, and then the juice in a moment... please wait until we can all partake together after everyone is served.

¹¹ Psalm 66:18; Matthew 18:35; 1 Peter 3:7

Jesus first took bread and gave thanks for it.

I’m going to ask _____ to give thanks at this time.

<<Man of Sorrows – Part 1>>

This cracker represents the body of Jesus Christ – broken on the cross to redeem sinners from their inability to keep His holy law. As we partake together – let’s rejoice in Christ’s provision for us.

the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

<<eat>>

The men are now coming forward to serve us the cup, as we remember the blood that was spilled to cover our sins.

As we prepare to remember Christ’s blood which covers our sins... I’m going to ask _____ to pray for us as we take the cup together.

Please sing with us as the juice is served, as we celebrate how the Man of Sorrows secured our eternal peace!

<<Man of Sorrows – Part 2>>

In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

<<drink>>

Amen.



The gospel of God is salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed,
Benediction



Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, ...according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.
Romans 16:25-27



Recommended Resources on What is the Gospel:

- John 1:12-13; 3:16-18
- Romans 1:16; 3:23; 4:25; 5:10; 8:1-4
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-6
- Ephesians 2:8-9
- 1 Peter 1:3-4; 2:24
- 1 John 3:1
- <https://www.crossway.org/blog/2016/10/what-is-the-gospel-2/>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-the-gospel.html>
- <http://tgc-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/booklets/Justification.pdf>
- *What is the Gospel*, Greg Gilbert
- *Cross-Centered Life*, CJ Mahaney
- *The Gospel Primer*, Milton Vincent

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read Galatians 1:4-5. The gospel is about what God has done for us. What motivates recovering Pharisees to seek to make the gospel about what we do for God?
2. Review Paul's greeting in Galatians 1:1-5. Which of the following doctrines are present in Paul's opening of this letter to the Galatian churches: Theology Proper (Trinity: God, Christ, Spirit); Church Leadership; Resurrection; Substitutionary Atonement; Justification; Sanctification; Church; Last Things; Election; Eternal State; etc. Does doctrine matter?
3. Review Paul's first missionary journey in Acts 13-14. What is the significance of Galatians being a

circular letter to be read and passed along to all the churches in the region?

4. Discuss the background of this book together. Why is it so important that Paul starts this letter with such a clear articulation of the Gospel?
5. Why would someone not believe in God's Gospel alone for their salvation? How do you overcome temptations to nullify the grace of God (Galatians 2:21)?