

“Turning Away”

...from the true gospel.
Galatians 1:1-5

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Galatians 1:1-5 *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 brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom [be] glory forever and ever. Amen.*

In both of Paul’s letters to his young protégé Timothy, he warned that the day would come when culture would begin to prevail, and even those who claimed the Christian faith would abandon the scriptural version. 1 Timothy 4:1-2 says “*Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly that in the last times some will turn away from the true faith; they will follow deceptive spirits and teachings that come from demons. These people are hypocrites and liars, and their consciences are dead.*” In his second letter, chapter 3, he tells us that “...*know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times... evil people and impostors will flourish. They will deceive others and will themselves be deceived.*” He goes on to describe such a world in most of chapter 3...a world that sounds a lot like our news reports on any given day in which we currently live.

Clear, concise, and thorough biblical teaching is rare, and even more rare is those who will actually base their faith lives upon it. Untold multitudes are attending a church today that is Christian in name only, for they have decided in their own hearts and minds what they will believe despite the fact that much of it is in flagrant disagreement with the Bible. There is a perception out there today that because truth is no longer truth for everyone, that I can be a Christian and not base my life on the Bible. Yet without such, we have nothing. Merely a community club with fluid participatory guidelines.

There are no doubt a plethora of issues in this world that we individually know nothing about, don’t need to know, and we don’t care to know. But when it comes to the principles of our salvation and standing before our Creator, there can be little room for personal bias and subjective interpretations of foundational elements. Yet that is the world we live in today. On issues of critical importance however, we are not left to guess nor are we left to stake our position based upon situational ethics or personal bias. God doesn’t have to agree with us, but to be a Christian we do however have to agree with him, and moreover surrender our lives, our passions, and our actions to His design. You don’t *have* to agree with God, but you do if you want to actually BE a Christian and be reborn.

For instance, in Hebrew, the word “repent” means “*to turn the other way, especially in the context of returning to the starting point.*” So “repent” in Hebrew means to turn away from sin and turn toward God in a restored relationship like it was in the beginning of creation. Most of us would have little trouble with that definition. But in Greek, the word means “*to think differently about something afterwards, to reconsider and change one's*

mind." So "repent" in Biblical Greek means to actually agree with God about the sinfulness of a past action or attitude and then to live in such a way that aligns with this new belief. Now let's be honest. We may not readily speak of it, but there are times that we...in our flesh, do not *like* something God does or demands. But liking it does not change God's position and we are to adhere to *His* if we want to be one of his disciples. If we...in our flesh, LIKED everything about following God, everyone would be a Christian, if only for the aspect of self-interest.

Another example is the clear teaching in scripture...a.k.a 1 John, that says that if we hate a brother we are the equivalent of a murderer, a liar and we "do not love God." And yet many of us regularly do so with perceived righteousness. I know, I know...we will claim that we don't *hate* them really, so we are innocent of the charge. But this is a clear example of rewriting truth. The dictionary defines hate as "*to dislike intensely or passionately; feel extreme aversion for or extreme hostility toward; detest.*" And 1 John defines such the same way.

Galatians is a treatise on *the basis for* and *the positional aspects of* true salvation. Paul in Galatians cuts through the religious and denominational bias's and lays out the foundational aspects of Christian redemption and faithful living *according to Christ and scriptural design.*

* Clearly we see that from the very opening in the *Book of Galatians*, Paul's "tone" and his writing style is significantly different than his other letters. This letter has a terse feel to it, and it's obvious that Paul is writing it under a certain amount of stress. Upon arriving back in Antioch from his first missionary journey after eighteen months on the road, Paul received a report that the churches he had started in Galatia had fallen into hard times—specifically, they had fallen into error.

False teachers and religious critics had arisen within the early churches who were both attempting to re-write the scriptures for their own advancement, and denouncing Paul and his ministry at the same time. These critics were loud, pervasive, and were proficient in "itching the ears" of those who were immature in the faith and those who had a personal "ax to grind." These leaders were twisting the scriptures in attempt to gain power over the people and to exalt themselves into positions of power. They were "wanna-be's": "*Arm chair quarterbacks.*" And because of people's ignorance of scripture and love of hearing about other's "dirty laundry", these men were able to gain a following. The false teachers were adeptly appealing to men's flesh and worldly passions and while they did not seek to debunk Christianity as a whole, they rewrote, re-interpreted, and re-envisioned faith in God to align more to the whims and desires of an un-surrendered *albeit a fundamentally "believing"* life.

Eventually these false teachers got around to attacking Paul himself. (*They always do!*) They criticized his appearance and lied concerning his motives and his personal character. They ignored the vast fruit of his ministry and went after him personally, accusing him of being mean and controlling. Yet Paul was never one to back down, and in this letter to the church in Galatia, Paul comes out of the gate shooting.

It's been said that the book of Galatians was written with a "blazing pen." Paul clearly was never really one to deal with such evil through a closed-door forum or religious symposiums, and thus in this letter we find him in full characteristic form. These detractors would have never show up to such forums and symposiums anyway, for their work is done in backrooms and dark alleys. So Paul was going to settle it "out in the street," so to speak. He would now bring their accusations and evil into the very light of day and deal with it out in the open with the facts and the truth of the gospel as Jesus gave it.

Galatians, in many ways, is the "Cliff Notes" version of Romans and is delivered in a fast, hard-hitting manner.

Most, if not all, of Paul's other letters were apparently dictated to someone who penned his words on paper. But this letter was seemingly so urgent and so critical that Paul did not wait around for a secretary, but wrote this letter in his own hand.

What gives Paul the right or the credentials to write such a letter...what is effectively the 'last word' on grace? Perhaps because he had actually lived on both sides of this religious division and understood both the draw and its subsequent results. Paul's past was as a "Jew of Jews". He was member of the Jewish Sanhedrin and a staunch advocate of strict traditional and even radical Judaism. He knew well the issue of works-based religion, and therefore the fallout of such an empty and humanistic ideals. He knew well the life of the "three R's of religion": rules, regulations, and rituals. His beliefs took him to a position of power but also to a world of persecution, violence and even murder...all in the name of his god.

* Galatians is a declaration of freedom. It is a throw-down against adding to the *cross of salvation*. It is not, however, a license for spiritual laziness or a "get-out-of-jail-free" card when it comes to serving Christ, church, and kingdom. The false teaching brought to the Galatian churches by the Judaizers has been extremely difficult to root out even today. We are required to walk a fine line—we do not want to fall into the legalism that the Galatians struggled with, but on the other hand we know we cannot just live as if "anything goes." The Christian's commitment to Christ is based on the free gift of grace through faith, but as Paul articulated at the end of Galatians, it also results in a life of walking by the Spirit. Too often we lose ourselves at the extremes, ending in a legalistic attempt to earn our salvation or a devil-may-care attitude about our sin. Grace cannot be used as a freedom to sin, and it does *not* in any way negate the rest of scriptural direction as many want to use it today!

Chapter 1, 1:1-2

Right out of the gate, Paul claims that his position is that of an apostle. From the opening salvo there is an air of battle. I guess if a person wasn't going to...*or isn't going to*, accept Paul's authority, then everything that follows would be an empty discourse. Authority is still a tricky business because of our general animosity against authority in most every form. I know my own authority as a pastor and a shepherd goes only so far before I am told to take a "flying leap." A pastor learns early to be aware of who is behind him when buses are passing by.

Paul's claim was that he was not merely a *disciple*, a "student *of* and a follower and adherent *to* the teachings of Jesus Christ," but an *apostle*; one who was "*sent out personally by Christ as an eyewitness, and who wrote books of the Bible with the authority given to them by Christ.*" Indeed, one must be very careful with such titles. Men love titles and love to wear them in order to gain personal authority and position. There are plenty of folks around today that have anointed themselves as apostles and prophets in order to gain an audience and a following. I remember a father of a young lady for whom I was doing her wedding. He handed me a card that said "Prophet *so-and-so*." I couldn't help the thought of such a dangerous self-anointing. For the scriptures declare that if he missed just one prophetic utterance that we were to take him outside and stone him to death!

Paul, however, was ready and able to take on the title of apostle, with all of its own ramifications and implications. Paul was able to wear such a title because he did meet Jesus on the Damascus road, was personally sent out by Him, and moreover had the life and the fruit to back up it up. An apostle is one who is "*a messenger, an envoy, an ambassador ...employed and deployed by the one he represents; owned by Christ, commissioned by Christ, empowered by Christ...*"

I won't be dogmatic about it, but I for one do not believe we have the position of apostle any longer in the traditional use of the word. Ephesians 2:20 tells us that the church has been built upon the foundation that the

Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles laid down for us... *past tense*, and we would be well advised to beware of those who attempt to bring “new” revelation to the gospel of Christ. This would include Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, ‘Prosperity’ adherents, etc. who have clearly added to the Word of God that you hold in your hands today.

But even outside of such heresies, there are plenty of folks within the traditional Christian church that have a problem with this also. An apostle was, in practice, a “messenger from God.” And speaking for God is a serious business! Scripture is emphatic as to the practice of saying God said something that He didn't. That never went well.

Paul often spoke of authentic messengers and false messengers. A real messenger of God glorifies God and brings unity, while a false messenger of God glorifies himself and brings division. John 10:1 warns us, "*Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber.*"

* As we already mentioned, the way that Paul opens this letter is noticeably different than his other letters, and expresses the tone in which he writes it. He was not only addressing the believers in Galatia, but also all those who would seek to undermine the gospel, his ministry, and even himself personally. Such attacks against God and his servants still go on today by those who seek to subvert and belittle a particular ministry. In such cases, the attackers inevitably slander the minister, especially when they cannot argue against the doctrine, the teachings, or most of all, the fruit emanating from that ministry.

Despite the fact that Paul takes up the mantle of an apostle, he clearly stated that he was not so dubbed, anointed or sent out by men. Paul wasn't trying to be Pope Paul or to minister in the realm of a “Rambo.” We know from his other writings that he was never an island unto himself, nor did he operate solo or with impunity. He is careful to add herein that he writes as an apostle, but he does so with “*all the brethren who are with me.*” Elsewhere Paul reiterates this position, especially in chapter 2 of this letter. Paul understood, as we all should, the need for accountability within the ministry.

One might rightfully ask at this point, if our calling is from God, what then is the value of ordination? Ordination is the confirmation of a man's life, ministry and doctrine by others who have proven themselves genuine in ministry. It is the testimony of witness. It cannot add or subtract from a man's true calling. You may see it as earthly credibility, but when a man is setting out in ministry, often those he seeks to minister to do not yet know whether he is the man he claims to be. And while no man is the final say on another's credibility, the truth is that God used men throughout scripture to stand with and for other men on the issue of ministry credibility. Elijah for Elisha, Paul for Timothy, Mark and others, Barnabus for Paul, Moses for Joshua, etc.

Those who stand up for the minister who is “entering the scene” are therefore to become his confidants, his counsel, and his accountability partners. Such is still very important for all believers to have, not just those in full time ministry. A man who takes upon himself the mantle of ministry and does not have such, stands in danger of moving off course and losing his perspective in the quagmire of the flesh. This is where abuses in the pastorate have occurred. People's lives and spiritual development have often been adversely affected by those who were self-anointed or not held accountable to scriptural mandates. Cults have often begun in such a manner also. So earthly ordination is not without its benefits.

Certainly, abuses can happen if the criteria for ordination is not held to purely biblical standards and ideals.

The pastoral epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus lay out the criteria, such as he must not be a new believer and he must first be tested before he leads. Ordination serves to show humility as well as accountability and by design calls for a person to be a part of the greater church of God. It is a safety net for the flock and prevents a one man dictatorship in leading the local church.

That being said, we must remember that on the other side of that man is just more men. If God indeed has His hand upon an individual, no earthly blessing, nor the lack of such will change anything. And if He does not, no ordination is going to make him into a leader or a great shepherd for God!

True ordination is a waiting upon God to train, break, establish and prove that He has indeed chosen that individual and that the man is willing and able to “step up.” When ordination is eventually given, there is a group of trusted and proven men who have watched that man closely and are testifying they have seen God’s hand upon him, and they have personally witnessed both the qualifiers and the skills required to take that mantle. The bottom line in all of this is that no amount of schooling or earthly mandate is going to make a minister. Only God makes ministers. Ordination is just saying that the individual has been tested and has passed.

1:3-5

It is a common saying, but worth repeating: grace and peace must come in that order. We will never know real peace without truly knowing and embracing God’s grace first. (we have learned that over the final weeks in 1 Corinthians study) Paul is and was going to present a clarity that works oriented faith will not bring peace! When our salvation is up to us to us to earn, we are not at peace. Because in our hearts and minds we will always wonder if we have done enough to warrant eternal life and kingdom position. We will always think we must do more, work more, etc., in order to “hedge the bet.”

One of the foundational aspects of true Christianity is that our position is not based on what we *do*, but rather about *what has been done*. On the cross, Jesus said, “*It is finished.*” He did it all, and it is done and over. No one needs to add to a Picasso or a Rembrandt. They are perfect, they are complete, and nothing you can do with your crayons is going to make them any better. They are works of art, perfect in their finished state. And those works of art are nothing compared to the symphony of salvation. No one gets out a harmonica and a pen to add a line of music to Beethoven or Brahms. It’s done, and it’s a masterpiece.

The artist did it all, and it is simply ours to stand back in awe and wonder. Oh yes! Mozart’s “Marriage of Figaro” needs a little banjo to really finish it off! You may say, “Hey, but I’m part of the orchestra. I’m not playing the banjo.” But gang, it is ours to simply *play* the music, not rewrite it or add to the notes. It is ours to play the music of salvation, not add to the music!

When we live out Jesus, when we serve Him and yes, *even when we do good works with a righteous heart and motivations*, we are playing the music of salvation and the cross. And when we do it well, it’s beautiful!

Those who seek to add to the cross are, in effect, lifting man up to be like God. It is the exaltation of humanity. In this, we jump past our innate state of sinfulness and unrighteousness and say that we can earn or deserve our salvation! And we can’t and we don’t! Grace however, exalts God. It places Him high and us low. It says we are sinners and unrighteous and we don’t deserve to even be in His presence. It says He does it all, that He is the artist, the composer, the creator, and we are, at best, just the band. We get to play His song, but we will never be on par with the composer. He does not need us. Salvation stands alone, complete and finished.

But how I love to play His music!

