

## ***Setting the stage for the defense of the gospel (Galatians 1:1–5)***

There is an ever present need to proclaim and defend the gospel, good news which the apostle Paul ardently defends in his letter to the churches of Galatia. Some were trying to distort his message, his apostleship had been challenged, and believers were confusing liberty for license.

Whether writing to churches in ethnic Galatia or to churches in the south of the Roman province of Galatia which had been established on Paul's first missionary journey, the challenge was clear: Was he an authoritative messenger of Jesus Christ? Was his message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone God's good news? How should believers use the freedom bought by Christ? The answers are developed in the letter, but the introduction to the letter sets the stage.

### **I. *Paul was a divinely authorized messenger.***

1. *Paul's apostleship:* An apostle is one who is sent with the authority of the one sending him, often with a specific task and with authenticating credentials. More than his other letters, Paul emphasizes to the Galatians that he was an apostle, an emissary, of Jesus Christ, commissioned directly by Jesus and God the Father. Though becoming an apostle in an untimely manner (1 Corinthians 15:8–9; cf. Acts 1:15–26), he still was an eye witness of the resurrected Lord Jesus, being directly commissioned by Jesus.
2. *The importance of a divinely commissioned gospel messenger:* Paul had to defend his apostleship in order to defend the gospel. The gospel he preached was divinely given good news. No one has the authority to alter God's message, not by changing it, distorting it, diluting it, or adding to it. Knowing it is God's truth motivates diligence in study and precision in proclamation. You may boldly proclaim what God has commanded.

### **II. *Salvation is a work of God from start to finish.***

1. *Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins.* It is a core truth of the gospel that the death of Jesus was necessary to pay the penalty of sin for us (cf. Romans 4:25; 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:3). Nothing can be added to the price of the believer's redemption without wrongly devaluing the sacrifice of Christ. It is essential for us to believe and proclaim that Christ died for our sins, all our sins, without the need or ability in us to provide anything else to appease the justice of God.
2. *God had planned this from the beginning.* Centuries before Paul God had foretold in the Old Testament the death and resurrection of Christ (1 Corinthians 15:3–4). It was the predetermined plan of God (cf. Acts. 2:23). Christ died in accordance with the will of our God and Father. His death was not an accident, not a secondary plan, not a correction of a failed law system. It was a fulfilment of what was expected and anticipated.
3. *The Father raised Him from the dead.* The resurrection of Jesus is an essential part of the gospel, a necessary response of the Father to the successful work of the Son in providing redemption (Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:3–4). The resurrection of Jesus is part of His exaltation by which the Father made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) and the One to whom all will one day bow (Philippians 2:9–11). Paul was a representative of the exalted Lord and as such his message from Christ is to be heeded for our justification and sanctification.
4. *It is to the eternal glory of God.* Only a gospel of pure grace in Christ brings glory to God. There can be no boasting of what the believer has done, only a boasting in the Lord and what He has done.

### **III. *The Christian life is intended as freedom from evil.***

1. *Believers are rescued from an evil age that is heading for destruction.* Believers are “delivered” (ESV) in that they are removed from an evil world system and “rescued” (NIV) in that they are removed from danger in this age's ultimate destruction.
2. *Believers are rescued so as not to participate in the evil of the world, but exercise their freedom to serve others.* Believers should no longer live as the unregenerate do. Their freedom from the bondage of sin is freedom to serve others.

The gospel is a message which we need to know and understand for our own salvation and to proclaim to others who ask the reason for our hope. Let its divine authority embolden you and its essential nature motivate you. Rejoice and give God the glory to whom it belongs.

*Questions for further thought and discussion:*

- What are you trusting in to be right with God? Does it conform with the good news in Scripture? How well can you explain it to another? Can you help a person find it in the Bible?
- What are common misconceptions about who gets to go to heaven? How would you answer them from the Bible?
- How does Paul in the letter to the Galatians describe this present evil age? In what sense(s) are we delivered from it? What is emphasized in Galatians?