**INTRODUCING THE MAIN THEMES**

***Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—*** ***2and all the brothers with me,***

***To the churches in Galatia:***

***3Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,4who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,*** ***5to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.***

**Galatians 1:1-5 (NIV)**

The letter to the Galatians was pivotal to Luther and Calvin’s struggle with Roman Catholicism. But reading it primarily to understand justification by faith is to miss its prime emphasis. In 3:3 Paul wrote ‘*After beginning with the Spirit, are you now trying to attain your goal by human effort?*’ Paul’s actual wording for this last phrase is ‘in flesh,’ a play on words referring to literal circumcision of the flesh as the primary issue regarding their ‘keeping’ the law. The biggest question being answered through the letter is not ‘How are people saved?’ (to use contemporary language) but whether people who are already ‘saved’ also need to practice specific aspects of the Jewish Law (the Torah). The concern is not how one begins life in Christ, but whether, once begun, one must also add aspects of the Law to complete one’s faith in Christ.

Almost all letters from the Greco-Roman period began with a three-fold introduction: the writer, to the addressee and a greeting. The next item would often be a wish or prayer for the health or well-being of the letter’s recipient. Paul’s letters usually followed the standard form and included a thanksgiving.

Since Galatians is a letter written to Gentile believers who became converts through Paul’s own ministry, the news about what has been happening in those churches colours even these opening words. Paul uses the standard salutation to introduce in an indirect way the two primary concerns of the letter: his own divinely-appointed apostleship (1:1) and the fact that salvation is by faith alone.

‘*Paul … and all the brothers with me’* (1:1,2). There is no serious question about whether Paul actually wrote this letter. While the letter was not a mosaic where Paul wrote some and others wrote some, Paul includes ‘*all the brothers with me’* intentionally. This would reinforce the urgency of what he was setting out to write, that it was not simply his opinions against his detractors, but that they were all of the same mind with Paul. Some of these ‘*brothers’* were almost certainly with Paul when he had come to Galatia and there proclaimed the gospel. Solitary travel by an itinerant preacher was seldom ever done. This is backed up by Paul’s reference to the gospel ‘we’ preached in 1:8,9.

*‘Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man’* (1:1). He asserts from the outset that he is an apostle ‘*sent not from men nor by man.’* This means his apostleship, (and by implication his understanding of the gospel), had neither human origins nor human mediation. In the context of Galatians this means that his apostolic authority did not come from a man, especially not from the leaders in Jerusalem, nor was he sent out to preach Christ on the basis of a human directive. Paul is contrasting himself to the agitators (they have human credentials while he is divinely ordained). The agitators may have openly questioned Paul’s credentials. It is quite likely they have denied the validity of his authority (and therefore of his gospel) since he does not come from Jerusalem as they have, and they have come with the Jerusalem apostles’ blessing. This would account for Paul’s desire to distance himself from Jerusalem in 1:13 - 2:10. What the agitators saw as a positive for them and a negative for Paul (‘in contrast to him we are authorised by Jerusalem’), Paul saw as the opposite. They had human authority while his was from God.

‘*Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead’* (1:1).Paul’s word order is important. In 1 Corinthians 9:1 he predicated his apostleship first of all on the fact that he had seen Christ, his way of speaking of his Damascus Road experience. It was the risen Christ who turned him from an enemy into a servant, from a persecutor into an apostle.

It was this revelation that radicalised Paul. His passionate hatred of the early believers was the direct result of their worshipping as Lord someone whom God had cursed by having him crucified. Paul thought anyone who proclaimed the ultimate contradiction of a ‘crucified Messiah’ was deranged and needed to be stopped. But on the Damascus Road the crucified One now confronted Paul as the living One. This meant for Paul a total rethink about his Jewish messianic expectations. The crucifixion was something God had planned from eternity’s past. So, in this letter, with Paul’s apostleship having been called into question by the agitators, Paul’s first mention of Christ as the source of that apostleship, includes God the Father. It was by virtue of the Father’s having raised and exalted Him that the Son now functions as the One who has been given the name above every name, before whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess His Lordship (Philippians 2:10). Paul’s apostleship had come directly from the risen Lord, the Lord whom God the Father had raised from the dead.

‘*To the churches in Galatia’* (1:2b). In Paul’s day ‘Galatia’ was a geographical title for a Roman province in the central-southern interior of Asia Minor (present-day Turkey). This Roman province was a political creation without natural ‘people-boundaries’ that marked the people as different to others. It included ethnic Galatians, a people who had migrated from Gaul (present-day France) in the third century BCE, who lived in north central Asia Minor, as well as other ethnic groups. The phrase ‘*in Galatia’* is more than likely a reference to churches somewhere in the Roman province of Galatia. But when in 3:1 Paul speaks of them as ‘*foolish Galatians*,’ this has all the earmarks of ethnicity and not of arbitrary political boundaries. In favour of the letter being written to the churches in the province of Galatia is the two-fold mention of Barnabus in 2:1,13 as someone known to the recipients. According to Acts 15:36ff Barnabus did not accompany Paul when he went through the northern region. What is clear is that the agitators had created trouble for Paul and the gospel in several of *his* churches in at least part of the province of Galatia.

‘*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’* (1:3). The traditional greeting in the Hellenistic world was *chairein* – rejoice – but in salutations it simply meant ‘Greetings’ (Acts 15:23). In Paul’s hands *chairein* became *charis* (grace) to which he added the traditional Jewish greeting *shalom* (‘peace,’ in the sense of ‘wholeness’ or ‘well-being’).

While the NIV has ‘*Grace and peace to you,’* Paul’s word order was ‘grace to you and peace.’ The grace of God in Christ is what God gives to His people; peace is what results from receiving the gift, hence, ‘grace to you and peace.’ The sum total of God’s activity toward human creatures is found in the word ‘grace.’ God has given Himself to His people fully and mercifully in Christ. Nothing is deserved. The full experience of those grace benefits results in peace – both now and to come. Peace flows out of grace, and both together flow from *‘God our Father’* and were made effective in us through ‘*the Lord Jesus Christ.’*

‘*Lord’* in ‘*Lord Jesus Christ’* is always a title, even when there is no definite article (‘the’) before it. In Galatians the title is used less than elsewhere in Paul’s letters because his focus is not on Christ’s present reign as the exalted Lord in heaven but on His saving activity.

‘*Jesus’* is the earthly name for the Son, and occurs less frequently in Paul’s letters as a stand-alone name than the other names or titles. This naturally follows because the name ‘Jesus’ marks His earthly life and Paul’s emphasis in his letters is primarily on His saving work for us.

The name ‘Christ’ is first of all a descriptive title for His Messiahship. It is Paul’s most frequently used title (37 times in all; in 22 it stands-alone). By the time of this letter, the title had become a name and its frequent use in Galatians relates closely to Paul’s emphasis throughout on Christ’s saving work.

In 1:1 it was ‘*Jesus Christ and God the Father,’* giving Paul opportunity to elaborate on the Father as the One who exalted the crucified Jesus to be the now risen Lord. Then in 1:3 it was ‘*God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’* giving Paul opportunity now to elaborate now on Christ.

***‘****The Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’* (1:3b,4). Paul makes three points. The Lord Jesus Christ is the means of our salvation. He ‘*gave himself for our sins.’* For the most part Paul speaks of Paul’s sacrifice in less personal terms as the means of redemption (depending on the view of sin involved e.g. redemption from sin’s slavery). Here Christ ‘*gave himself for our sins.’* In 2:20 he speaks of ‘*the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me*.’

Although the Old Testament sacrificial system ultimately lies behind the imagery used here, the language itself echoes three verses from Isaiah 53 in the Greek text: *‘the one who bore our sins’* (Isaiah 53:4); ‘*the Lord gave* *him up for our sins’* (Isaiah 53:6); ‘*he was given up because of our sins’* (Isaiah 53:12). While the larger issue for Paul is our sinfulness in general (sin), this ‘sin’ is woven into the very fabric our fallenness and expresses itself in individual ‘sins.’ The gospel message Paul saw so clearly was that God’s Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ‘*gave himself’* (in His sacrifice on the cross) *for our* (many) *sins*.’

In the context of this Galatians letter, this clause ‘*gave himself for our sins’* anticipates the ultimate question as to whether Gentiles need also to become obedient to certain aspects of Torah to qualify them as full members of God’s newly constituted Israel. This drives Galatians from beginning to end. Paul says ‘no.’ Since ‘*Christ … gave himself for our sins’* and we have received the Spirit (3:3), there is no place for the Law of Moses in the newly formed people of God, made up of both Jews and Gentiles together.

***‘****The Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’* (1:3b,4). Secondly, Paul expresses the goal of our salvation as: ‘*to rescue us from the present evil age’ –* not out of ‘*this present evil world’* (KJV). God’s purpose is not to take us out of the world, but that we should stay in it and both be ‘the light of the world’ and ‘the salt of the earth.’ Christ died to rescue us ‘out of this present age of wickedness’ (NEB) or as it can be equally translated ‘out of the present age of the wicked one’ because the wicked one, the devil, is its lord.

The Bible divides history into two ages: ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come.’ The ‘age to come’ has begun already, because Christ began it with His resurrection. The Jews believed ‘this age’ would end as ’the age to come’ began. Paul saw both ages running concurrently. They overlap one another. When we place our faith exclusively in Christ we are rescued from ‘the old age’ and are transferred into ‘the age to come.’ The Christian life is living in this age the life of the age to come. The clause ‘*to rescue us from the present evil age* ’expresses Paul’s eschatological view of salvation where the future overlaps with the present. The ambiguity for us, whether Paul is thinking of the present or the future, was not a difficulty for him. Redemption for Paul is not just ‘forgiveness of sins’ but embraces deliverance from the bondage of the powers of darkness. The nearest he comes to this in his other letters is Colossians 1:13*‘’For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves.’*

For Paul the severest form of bondage in this present evil age is not to ‘powers’ but to one’s own sinfulness. ‘Sins’ are more than expressions of disobedience to God’s moral laws. They are a form of bondage to the present evil age from which Christ died to deliver us. The purpose of Christ’s death was not only to bring us forgiveness, but, having been forgiven, that we should live a new life, the life of ‘the age to come.’ ***‘****The Lord Jesus Christ … gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.’*

Christians are recipients of God’s rescue mission. The Greek verb translated ‘*rescue’* in ‘*The Lord Jesus Christ … gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age’* is used in Acts 7:34 of the rescue of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery, in Acts 12:11 of the rescue of Peter both from prison and from the hand of Pharaoh, and in Acts 23:27 of the rescue of Paul from an infuriated mob about to lynch him.

***‘****The Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father’* (1:3b,4). Thirdly, Paul describes the source of the Galatians’ salvation. What Christ did was ‘*according to the will of our God and Father.’* The work of Christ was enclosed within the overall comprehensive will of God the Father. The *‘grace and peace’* Paul desired for the Galatians were from ‘*God our Father’ as* well as ‘*the Lord Jesus Christ*.’

So having touched on the main points he will expand in the letter, Paul returns to where he began, with mention of God our Father, whose eternal will lies behind everything – Christ’s redemptive work and so our eternal salvation. ‘*Our God and Father,* *5to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen’* (1:4b,5). This is one of six outbursts of praise in Paul’s writings (Romans 11:36; 16:27; Philippians 4:20; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2 Timothy 4:18). Each come at moments when Paul is so full of what he has been writing that he bursts into praise. All that God has done for us in Christ is ultimately to His own glory, a glory that God’s people should also recognise and live in accordance with.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

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