

LSB Galatians 1:1 - 10

1 Paul, an apostle—not sent 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 so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

This morning we begin a study of the book of Galatians. If the Lord allows it my hope is to plod our way expositively through Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

If the book of Romans is the grand statement of christianity, these 4 smaller books cover all of the themes of Romans in more polemic style. Each one addresses problems that had arisen in the different places as we will see.

But the letter to the Galatians is critical because it answers the question, how much can you get the gospel messed up and still have an effective gospel that produces actual regenerated born again christians? How much can you pile on and still have an effective gospel? How much can you trim off and still have an effectual gospel?

Does that seem important? There are multiple movements that would say, no that's not something to make a big deal about. Roman Catholics for instance have a doctrine they call natural theology. Natural theology according to the Roman church claims that there will be people who get to heaven who never even heard of Christ but they just naturally follow their conscience and live a good life and God won't exclude them.

Evangelicalism, like the Roman error has many who believe in something called the wideness of God's mercy. Some of you remember an old song;

There's a wideness in God's mercy,

*Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in His justice,
Which is more than liberty.*

How wide is that wideness? Is it important to consider? If error at some level means the difference between an eternity with God in Christ in heaven or eternity in hell, does that seem important.

The Mormons are fine moral folks, some of them seem to put evangelicals to shame, and they get all weepy about someone they've invented that they call Jesus, not the Jesus of the Bible, but a new better Jesus, a more fantasmagasmical Jesus than our Jesus. (but he doesn't forgive sinners) Is God's mercy wide enough for them? This wideness idea. Anybody good is good enough for God.

And what about our Catholic friends that we love dearly. Spoiler alert. This book we are embarking on caused the reformation. Martin Luther was studying and teaching this letter from Paul to the Galatians when he nailed his **95 Theses** on the door of the cathedral at Wittenberg in 1517.

Is differentiating between what Jesus called the wide road that leads to destruction and the narrow path that leads to life, important? Heaven or hell? Is that important?

Well I can tell you at least one person who thought it was important, and that would be the apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ whose name is Paul. He used to be Saul, but his transformation after he met the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus was so profound that he got a name change. Paul. By Acts 13 he is never referred to as Saul again, he is Paul.

And this matter is so important to Paul that he quite literally bursts into this room with both guns blaring. Paul is furious with what has transpired within the situation in the churches in the region called Galatia.

Galatia is a region, not a single city like the other books we'll hopefully

look at. The region included 4 towns, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Pisidion. Antioch all could be considered southern Galatia. All were affected with this particular cancer that Paul will need to cut out. All were churches he had established on his first missionary journey.

They were close to his home base of Antioch so he would visit them again on his other journeys. He loved these folks. They would have been among his first gains for the kingdom of God. Some of his first successful churches established among the gentiles God had called him to be the apostle to.

So when things begin to go amiss with these folks that's a direct hit for Paul. He takes this very personally. That someone would come and successfully undo what God did for these folks using Paul is a personal frontal attack from Satan to Paul. It's personal to him. Like a punch in his gut. Like a general in a war zone who had successfully taken territory from the enemy and then in his absence the territory slips back into enemy control. The loss is both real and personal.

A little more background on this letter; It is among the earliest documents of the church and the New Testament canon. The book of James is considered the first of the Christian writings somewhere around 49 AD. This letter from Paul may be the second and may be as early as 50-51 AD.

The occasion of the writing is this. After Paul had established these churches and moved farther on in his journeys turning the world upside down, men came from Judea, Jerusalem and that region of Israel where Jesus had lived and walked, and they told these people in these churches something like this;

Paul isn't a full apostle and he doesn't have the full message. Yes, Jesus is the Way, the only way to salvation, but you have to access Him through Judaism. You have to be circumcised first. And you have to obey all that Moses said. All of the Jewish feasts and laws are to be practiced in order for you to be able to access the salvation Jesus offered.

In effect, the thing that makes christianity, real christianity that produces transformed from the inside out christians, different from all other religions is that it is the only religion in the universe where God reaches down to dead men, spiritually dead and soon enough physically dead, and God quickens them from the dead and makes them alive together with Christ.

God does all of it, we do nothing to gain our salvation. We can't even respond to the message while we're spiritually dead. That quickening from the dead actually happens first so that we can even respond to the gospel in faith which is a gift from God to us. God does all of it, we do none of it, as we shall see.

All *other* religions are the same. People doing stuff. Stuff stuff stuff. Working their way to God through law keeping and ceremonies and self torture and whatever other weirdness Satan can inject. All the same. Every one, work your way to heaven.

Get a prayer rug and a funny hat and point it towards mecca and listen to strange sounds call you to prayer that the true God hates in His ears. Bob up and down. Get uncomfortable for goodness sakes. Do stuff. Sleep on a bed of nails. God will like you for that. Eat nothing but bread and water. That will impress God. Put on an iron chastity belt with nails pointing in and torture yourself. God digs that.

What rubbish. All religion is rubbish. One religion is a relationship where God reaches down to us and makes us alive together with His Son Whom He rose from the dead. Nothing we could do to earn any of God's favor. In fact in our deadness we couldn't hear or receive the gospel message.

Faith alone. By grace alone. In Christ alone. By authority of the revealed Scriptures alone. For the glory of God . . . alone.

That was what Paul was bringing to these peoples as God was working with His called out ones, His chosen elect ones, forming real churches of

rescued sinners. Until the Judaizers came along in Paul's wake, after he left, and told these folks, no no no, you didn't get the complete package with Paul. You have to DO stuff.

You have to jump through Jewish hoops in order to qualify for this salvation. Yes it's Jesus who saves you, but He only saves Jewish converts who are totally into Jewish ritual and ceremony and law keeping. Do that along with your salvation and you'll be fine. Get to work.

I Paul, an apostle—not sent from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead—

Because it pleased the Lord to choose Paul as a full apostle in a different manner than the original 11, Paul had to fight for the legitimacy of his calling the whole of his ministry and beyond. We're still fighting over Paul

To this day it still goes on. This week I studied something that's happening as we speak called "*The New Perspective on Paul*". N. T. Wright and other liberal theologians are redefining the classic understanding of Paul's writings as understood by the original hearers and we believe, rediscovered by the reformers.

These folks don't deny Paul's apostleship they say that Paul did not teach substitutionary atonement. Jesus blood shed for our sins. In fact some of these writers claim that idea is pagan brutality stolen from primitive ideas. They teach that Paul taught that Jesus was not more than a good example for us to follow in earning our salvation.

And isn't it sort of telling that every attack at the mechanics of true salvation is aimed at Paul. It was Paul who defined substitutionary atonement. God's wrath towards sinners satisfied in the death of His own Son. And God's Son's righteousness substituted to our accounts.

Paul clarified the atonement and therefore, Paul is always ground zero for anyone who desires to undo these doctrines. In the first century, the folks

who came to undo what Paul had done, actually what God had accomplished using Paul, they would come and say, Paul isn't an apostle. Paul was in la la land while Jesus walked and taught His chosen apostles.

Paul wasn't part of the original group. Paul elected himself as apostle years later and has taken the church in a new and different direction from the original 11 true apostles. Paul's christianity is different from what Jesus taught.

We still have this going on today. Ever heard of red letter christians? They want to relegate everything Paul taught and wrote as 2nd tier, perhaps even not inspired by God, we can pick and choose what's helpful from Paul, unlike the red letter stuff that Jesus spoke. That's the authoritative stuff.

This is particularly common in the last 20 years and partly driven by homosexuals who want to claim they are christians. Well, they have to get rid of Paul somehow because his definitions of their lifestyle in Romans chapter 1 is unassailable. Crystal clear.

So they devise this red letter christianity to make Paul go away and they say, Jesus never spoke against homosexuality. They forget that Jesus position puts them in more peril than Paul's.

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus. Matthew 5:17 - 19

Defaulting back to the red letters gets you Leviticus where that sin was dealt with as a capital punishment offense.

The folks who don't like the traditions the church has held for centuries

always attack the veracity of the apostle Paul. He's too doctrinal. Too clear. Too defined. If we're going to dismantle true christianity and make it ineffectual, Paul has to go. One way or the other. Get rid of Paul.

And thus the greeting to these christians who are dismantling Paul's christianity that he brought to them when they were ignorant gentiles, and replacing it with something other, something non Pauline. A mish mash of judaism and christianity that re-introduces a works righteousness salvation. You have to do stuff in order to be saved. Deadly error. Damning error.

So Paul begins with his apostolic authority. *I Paul, an apostle—not sent from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead—*

Number one. I am Paul. Number two, I AM an apostle. And number three, that apostleship did not come through the agency of men, I was annointed an apostle and sent to the gentiles to proclaim salvation in Jesus by Jesus Himself and God the Father who raised up Jesus from the dead.

Think about God's timing in calling Paul to be an apostle. Jesus has died, was risen again from the dead, and had ascended back into heaven. That makes Jesus sort of remote from the perspective of the remaining 11 apostles.

Is Jesus active after that. Yes, it was Jesus who stopped Paul dead in his tracks on the road to Damascus and blinded him temporarily and called him to stop persecuting the church and then set him apart for service to the gentiles. Paul is unique in that sense. A post resurrection post ascension apoltolic calling.

That is a foundation for authority that derives it's authority from the creator of the worlds. Apostolic authority is a direct line to God. They can define doctrine for the church. That was by God's design for His church.

But just here we may as well take a moment to address an issue. Once the

church was established by the apostles, when that generation died, when the apostle John perished in his 90's on the isle of Patmos, there was no apostolic succession. The writings of the apostles were gathered and canonized as authoritative to the church.

Our authority is solely to the canon of scriptures written by the apostles and sometimes their close associates. That canon is closed. Nothing new is added or subtracted after the apostle John wrote at the end of the book of the Revelation these words;

18 I bear witness to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book. 19 And if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

That seems pretty clear, right? The canon is closed. Do not add to it. Do not subtract from it. This book has all the authority of words revealed to us by God Himself who owns everything. Total authority. One book. Period.

OK, that makes sense, what about the Pope? The Catholic church claims he is in direct succession to the apostles and has the authority that the apostles had to define church doctrine.

In fact, just this week there is a bru ha ha where the Pope said that homosexuality is in fact a sin, but it is not a criminal act. And the college of Cardinals is having a little war, some in favor of loosening the strictures regarding that lifestyle, we might call them the liberal cardinals, and some conservative cardinals who are saying, no, the Pope is wrong.

Jesus in His words regarding the authority of the law of God clearly stated that God's law in Leviticus that makes homosexuality a criminal act can not be set aside. Not one jot. Not one tittle. Yet a Pope who claims to be in direct succession to the apostles, as an apostle, clearly said, yes it's a sin, but no, it isn't a criminal act.

Who's right? Jesus, or the Pope. That Pope claims all the same authority that Paul claims here in this opening sentence. Apostolic authority means Jesus is speaking through the mouth of the apostles. Same authority. Well, Jesus just contradicted something He said clearly in scripture according to the Catholic church. That's a problem. A lot of catholic theologians actually understand that they've got a problem but they can't let go of the idea of apostolic succession so, little by little the authority of the written word of God is undermined.

One of the guys working on our bathroom remodel was trying to tease me a little bit about being religious. So he wanted to know if I'd been to Rome to see the pope. And he was surprised to find out that I did witness Pope Paul VI throw his little blanket out the window sill and bless the people who were at Vatican square that day.

He was more surprised to learn that incident did not impress me in the least. In fact it made me sad. No life change for me that day. No extra blessing. I already owned the Lord Jesus Christ who dwelled in my heart, and He owned me. The papal blessing was zero to me. But I was there. 1971. Not impressed.

However, I am impressed and moved to action by Paul. Paul does in fact have apostolic authority, a direct line of authority given to him by Jesus Christ, who when He gave that authority to Paul, unlike the other apostles, He had been crucified and God the Father had raised Him back up from the dead.

So Paul is unique in his claim that his authority came direct from Jesus who was dead and is now alive again, having been resurrected from death that could not hold him. *1 Paul, an apostle—**not** sent from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead—*

That authority is unassailable. Pauls authority is a direct line from both

Jesus and God the Father. That means if Paul said it, God said it, Jesus said it. To undermine Paul is to make a direct assault on God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Paul begins immediately with this issue of authority. What I said and what I say, I say as an apostle in direct line of authority to God. Period. Wow. What a beginning! Both guns blaring. In vs. 1.

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,

Paul is the apostle, but he extends his greeting as coming not just from him, but also to include all of the brothers who traveled with him in this work that God the Father and the Lord Jesus had assigned for him to do.

They do not have apostolic authority like Paul, but it's nice to know that Paul doesn't stand alone. He has his armies with him that would back him up in whatever he lays down. Paul and all the brothers who are with me.

I would desire to be included in that group. I am a brother who would want to stand with Paul. If there's a war going on, and trust me there is always a war going on in Satan's turf, Satan's realm, I want to be able to say I'm one of the brothers who stands with Paul.

To the churches of Galatia: Note the plurality of churches. Again Galatia is a region, and apparently whoever it is that's following Paul around and saying, you know, Paul only got a partial gospel, we're from Jerusalem and we have the full gospel. Paul's gospel was incomplete.

That work to undo what Paul had done had apparently spread like cancer through all of the cells, the churches in the region of Galatia. It isn't a single problem in a single church. It's a regional problem.

Vs. 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,

Normally Paul opens a letter with some kind of praise, some kind of encouragement, something the folks are getting right, some strong point that Paul can praise them about. Some fond remembrance. Something positive.

Listen to the greeting to the Thessalonians by way of comparison;
Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ before our God and Father, 4 knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election, 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full assurance;

Compare that to *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. That's all he can offer these folks. It's almost like a hopeful prayer. I hope you find grace and peace, and it'll have to come from God and Jesus, because I'm bringing battle. I hope it ends peacefully, and if it does, it will be God's peace, Christ's peace given to you. But that's not where we're going to be able to begin.

There simply is nothing Paul can say to these folks that is positive. It's more like he's kicking the door in and guns will be blazing against heresy. Immediately. No niceties at the git go. No encouraging notes about all the things you're doing right, but we need to just tweak this one thing.

And then Paul starts with the gospel.

the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

OK, class. Here's your assignment. I want you to make two columns on a

piece of paper. Landscape mode so it's wide so you've got more room to write. At the top of one column write "Stuff God did for our salvation" and on the other side write "Stuff we did for our salvation".

Then I want you to go through those words in vs. 4 and write down all that God did in order for us to be rescued. Then on the other side write down all that we did in order for us to be rescued. Because those final words about glory forever are dependent on who causes this to happen.

Don't ever say I didn't give out easy homework assignments. You can complete this one in seconds, and then you can tear off the right side of the page and make a grocery list later on. Because that side is empty.

All we ever accomplished was the sin that necessitated the rescue. We were born into Adam's race. Rejects at enmity with God from our mother's wombs. We were literally born condemned.

David says; In sin did my mother conceive me. Sin is a disease we're born with. Indeed, in the king's english Psalm 51: 5 reads like this;
Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

David says he was a person before he was born. Shapen in iniquity. Born a sinner. From Adam our father until the babies born during these minutes that I speak, we are all born with Adam's disease, Adam's cancer. There is none righteous, no, not one.

The entire human race has only two possibilities. Destruction is one. Eternal damnation away from the presence of God. That's our status when we're born. Or, a second possibility. Rescue. Rescue from the damnation we deserved as born combatants against God.

So, then, vs 4 is good news. Really good news! *the Lord Jesus Christ. 4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age,*

Adam's race from that day to this day is continually and uninterruptedly the present evil age. An evil age that began in the garden when Adam chose to sin, and after him, all of his spawn were born sinners. That's our predicament. We live in an evil world. Trapped and held in a sentence of death because like our father Adam, we all sin. Every one.

We find that in that single rebellious act the ownership of this world, the authority to reign, the kingdom of this world passed to Satan. Man, trapped in sin, forfeited his reign to Satan. Jesus acknowledged that. Jesus called Satan the ruler of this world.

We are born into a hopeless situation. Born as bankrupt sinners. Born condemned. We are helpless to do anything about it. Hopeless bankrupts that have nothing to offer God. That's our condition, and that's every human's condition since Adam sinned.

But, having explained our predicament, listen again to vs. 4.
4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age,

Sin is our problem. Sin separates us from our Creator, who created us for His glory. Sin interrupts glory. Sin renders us ruined. Gross. Putrid. Dead. We're about as appealing to God, in our sin, as someone who took a swim in raw sewage. That's a picture of what we have to offer God.

Picture someone who swam upstream in a New York sewer pipe to get to a wedding. He comes into the bright clean hall and expects the folks in their pure wedding garments to receive him. Covered in excrement. That's us. That's the present evil age. We aren't welcome at that wedding. We would defile that wedding. God will not allow us at His wedding in that condition. But listen one more time to what Paul says in vs. 4

4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age,

Sin is the problem. Jesus died in our place, the death and punishment we had coming because of sin, He gave Himself as a substitute for our sins. He received the punishment, the death on a cross, we deserved for our sins.

And then He rescued us. He took on Himself our filth. And He gave to us His righteousness. His blood washed our sins away and we are pure, with a purity that isn't ours, it is His purity, His righteousness, given to us.

When we make that transaction we are literally removed from this condemned world. Our citizenship after that rescue, is in heaven. Even though we remain here in this world, our citizenship has been transferred from condemned to heaven.

*4 who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, **according** to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Jesus does the rescuing. Jesus does the dieing in our place. Jesus takes the filthy clothes and gives us sparkling clothes, white and clean. Why? If we didn't cause any of it, who did? And why??

according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever

That rescue with all of it's cost was ordered by the will of God. God caused our rescue to be achieved through His own Son's death in our place. God willed it, and God caused it. And we even have the answer as to why;

God did it for His own glory. Filthy sinful people cannot honor and glorify God. Rescued sinners who have a spotless purity given to them by Jesus, they **can** then glorify God and worship Him forever and ever.

That's the gospel folks. Pretty simple. We do nothing to achieve any of it. God wills it for us. Jesus accomplishes it for us. We can't achieve any of it. It is the gift of God for all who believe.

And that's Paul's starting point. A restatement of the simple elegant good news God has accomplished a rescue for you that snatches you out of this vile sinful sewer and cleanses you and clothes you in the very righteousness of His only sinless Son.

Let's take a moment and compare that gospel Paul just presented to the people of Galatia with his definitive statement of his gospel that he states clearly to the Corinthians.

1 Cor. 15:1 Now I make known to you, brothers, the gospel which I proclaimed as good news to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I proclaimed to you as good news, unless you believed for nothing. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 After that He appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep. 7 After that, He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also.

Almost word for word. The gospel message is very simple. You are in a world of hurt. Condemned in sin. Born condemned. Jesus died for our sins. After He died He arose from the dead. Our faith in the act of forgiveness Jesus accomplished in our place, on the cross, that faith is in a living person who rose from the dead and lives today.

Paul begins his letter to the Galatians, not with any commendations, but with a clear restatement of the gospel that originally called them out of this world and into a relationship that is unobtainable to sinners any other way.

With that paragraph in place, vss 1 - 5, next week we'll watch Paul do battle to rescue that simple gospel truth and guns will be blaring as he fights

against all of the junk that the judaizers have piled on top of the gospel, that effectively rendered the gospel to no affect.

Paul had freed these folks with the simplicity of the gospel. Freed from sin. Out from under the burden of sin. And they had stupidly walked right back into a hopeless slavery. Paul is incensed. He's mad.

Beloved, we are in a cosmic battleground. Satan is furious when sinners are rescued out of this world and called into the kingdom of God. Out of his grasp and transferred into the ownership of a new Master, the Lord Jesus.

And you better believe Satan does everything in his powers to limit the damage. The judaizers that came and troubled the gospel and added a works based salvation that effectively cancelled out the grace of God were part of Satan's plan to minimize the damage to his holdings.

Mess up christianity with works righteousness and the true gospel becomes ineffective. Salvation is by works with Jesus as a masthead if that makes you happy. But it's all about you doing stuff. Stuff stuff stuff.

That decimates the true gospel and renders it ineffective. Win for Satan, loss for the church. But Paul will do battle with the devil in this letter. And Jesus already promised us that the gates of hades will ultimately not prevail against His church. This is an exciting study for us.