



FREED BY GRACE

Galatians 1

Well, good evening. India is a wonderful country in so many different ways. There are definitely pockets of India that have political/religious unrest. Quite honestly, pockets of India, where it's not easy to be a follower of Christ. There are pockets in the southern part of India right now, particularly a place called Orissa, where some of you may know over the last few months, there's been horrible persecution of Christians by Hindu fundamentalists there in the south, who have burned Christian homes and villages and killed Christians, and there's a whole community of believers right now in Orissa that is living in refugee camps.

So, there are pockets like that; there are pockets in the northern part of India, where we did have the opportunity to spend some time, that are more Muslim, where it's not easy for many of our brothers and sisters. We were talking with a small group of believers that had gathered together in Northern India and hearing some of their stories. One particular brother, who is a church planter there, who basically, his story...his wife and him both grew up in Muslim families. His wife came to faith in Christ, and then very patiently and graciously led her husband, him, to faith in Christ. When they both had come to faith in Christ, they were ostracized from their families, kicked out of their families, basically, and they were trying to reconcile with their families. Long story short, about six months ago, his wife's family poisoned her and killed her, and he shared with us the sufficiency of God's grace in the middle of it all. However, there are...there are definitely parts of India where it's not easy to be a follower of Christ.

India is a needy country; physically needy, being in slums in India. If you've ever been in a slum in a city like Delhi, 14 million people, 4 million of whom live in slums. However, if you could imagine the equivalent of, basically, shacks that people live in...I think about 12 square meters...where a family of five may live; children running around, some with no clothes, and basically living in a community where the ground is just littered with human feces. It was unreal, physical poverty.

Not just physical poverty, though, but spiritual poverty. Northern India has about 600 million people, and less than one percent of those people are Christians. Six hundred (600) million, less than one percent Christian, and I had heard that number before, but over the last week-and-a-half, I saw their faces. If you could just imagine, whether in a huge city like Delhi, or in remote villages, face after face after face after face...they seem to go on, and on, and on, and on, and seeing those faces, knowing that most of them have never heard the gospel before.

It's not that they're not a spiritual people; they're an extremely spiritual people. They are avid worshipers. Worshipers of all kinds of different gods. 33 million-plus gods to be more specific. Gods everywhere. Every time you get into a cab to drive somewhere, you see on the dashboard gods that are set up, that are worshipped. You're driving by on the street and you see vending stands all along the street of people selling gods that people will buy, and they will worship. You're walking along the road, sidewalk, and you see people stopping

and praying to the tree that you're walking next to. If you could imagine millions upon millions of people tirelessly, endlessly trying to make peace with god or gods all around them, and the concept of grace, of a God who makes peace with us, is completely foreign.

As I was travelling back in and thinking particularly about what we're going to study tonight and the weeks to come, I couldn't help but be reminded of how grace is such a distinct, such a unique, revolutionary, foreign concept, not just in India, but even here, even in the church. Whether we're born in India or Birmingham, part of the sinful nature that we have in each of us is a nature that insists that we can make our way to God, that we can do something to get to God, and grace says, "No, you can't do it." Grace strikes the heart, the root of our pride and says, "You can't do it. Only God can make a way to you; you cannot make a way to Him."

This is huge. I've been thinking about this, especially in light of the last couple of months as we walked through this "Radical" series and looked at radical obedience, radical discipleship, and there's a tendency, temptation along the way to begin to think that, if we do these things, that we can earn favor before God, if we follow these tough commands. Some of you even probably thought during that series, "Is this grace? Where's the grace in this? Is this becoming legalistic? This is not the way things are supposed to be. Aren't we supposed to be talking about grace?"

Yes, we're supposed to be talking about grace. Grace must be central in every single thing we do in the church. If we miss grace, if we're not a grace-saturated people, then we miss the whole point of Christianity, and we undercut the very message we have to proclaim to the world. That doesn't mean that the truths we've been looking at in "Radical" are legalistic. I want us to talk about that. I want us to see over the coming weeks how grace is at the center of radical obedience.

So, here's what I want us to do. If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Galatians 1. I want us to walk through the book of Galatians. The reason why I want us to walk through Galatians as a faith family is because this is a book that was written specifically to address the centrality of grace in the church, and to counter legalistic tendencies that were creeping into the church.

It's really interesting, and this letter is written mostly likely to some young churches who were just beginning to grow, and I think when we see God moving in a powerful way in the church, we will always see the Adversary trying to bring in discord and doubt and division into the church. Really, the most fundamental part of what the church is about...and I can't help but think that as God takes us as a church to deeper and deeper places of abandonment, as we surrender our lives and His church, more and more to His cause, that the Adversary desires to take the very core of the gospel that we celebrate and begin to twist it.

So, I want us to be on guard against that. I want us to make sure that we know grace and the gospel, and we see grace, and we know when grace is not being preached, or we know when grace is not being taught, and we want to be able to recognize the gospel, the true gospel, and recognize when a false gospel is being preached. That's what the Galatian church was not doing. They were becoming susceptible to a false gospel that undercut the very foundation of grace.

So, here's what I want us to do. I want us to start tonight by reading Galatians 1, and it's going to set the tone for, really, this whole book and our understanding of grace,

particularly grace as it relates to every single one of our lives in this room...as it relates, gloriously, to every single one of our lives in this room.

So, listen to what Paul writes. There's going to be a lot of historical information in here that fits in with the context Paul is writing...addressing here in Galatians 1 that we're going to talk about, but let's read through it and then pray and ask God to help us by the power of His Spirit to understand what His Word has to teach us. Galatians 1:1,

Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead - and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and 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, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus.

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles - only James, the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

Let's pray together. God, we confess that we have a nature in us that resists grace, and we need grace to even understand grace. So, Father, we pray tonight that you would take the truths that came alive in your church in the first century, and you would bring them alive in this room in the 21st century.

God, we pray that you would help us to realize how glorious grace is, and I pray, God, especially for men and women, teenagers, children across this room, who've come into this room with a performance-based mentality, who come into this room, and we think that your pleasure in us is based on our performance before you. God, we pray that you would help us to realize the revolutionary truth of grace in the gospel, and that you would change lives. God, I pray that you would change lives tonight in this room for all of eternity, by your grace, and by this foreign concept to our sinful nature, but glorious concept for our salvation. So, toward that end, we pray that your Spirit would open our eyes and our hearts to understand your Word tonight, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We've got a lot of ground to cover...one chapter in Galatians. Thankfully, Wess Stafford went a little short last week, and so we've got some time to carry over. So, we are going to...some of you didn't think that was funny. What we're going to do is we're not going to be able to dive into every single word in Galatians 1, so what we're going to do is we're going to take the first few verses of Galatians 1, and we're going to let, specifically, verses 2 through 5 kind of set the tone for this chapter, and really for this whole book, and give us a picture of grace and the gospel, and what it means to be freed by grace.

In order to start really understanding this passage, we've got to understand who it's written to. It says, *"To the churches in Galatia..."* We've got to understand some of the background here. There's a little bit of debate, discussion amongst the Bible scholars about exactly when this book was written. Some people think this was the first letter Paul wrote, that it was very early on in his ministry after he planted this church in southern Galatia. Others think he had written it a little bit later, but the point is, regardless of when exactly he wrote it, there was a group among these churches that were scattered in Galatia...there was a group of people that had infiltrated the church called Judaizers. Judaizers were, basically, false teachers who were saying that in order to be saved, you need to trust in Christ and follow Jewish rules, Jewish laws, Jewish regulations. You had to trust in Christ and do these other things.

Hold your place in Galatians 1 and take a left with me back to Acts 15, two books back to Acts 15. I want to show you a very pivotal point in the early church here in the book of Acts, chapter 15. What happened was, the gospel started spreading, and as it spread, more Gentiles...more and more Gentiles were coming to faith in Christ...non-Jews, Gentiles, coming to faith in Christ. There was a big discussion, "Well, if Gentiles are coming to faith in Christ, then when they come to faith in Christ, do they need to follow all the Jewish rules and all the Old Testament rules, regulations, and rites? Most notably, do they need to be circumcised?" This was one of the big questions, "Is this a part of them coming into the church? Is this part of their salvation?" There was a whole group of people in the early church in the first century who were saying, "Yes, they need to be circumcised in order to be saved."

Look at Acts 15:1: *"Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'"* Now, we don't know if Paul...we don't know for sure if Paul wrote Galatians before this happened in Acts 15 or afterwards, but we know he's addressing this group of people, these *"some men"*, these Judaizers who were teaching that you needed to be circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses in order to be saved.

What happened here in Acts 15 was they had a discussion among leaders in the early church, and they decided, "No, no, this is contaminating the grace in the gospel. You don't have to be circumcised in order to be saved." You get down to verse...look in verse 8. Peter's speaking up here. He says,

God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted [Gentiles] by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us.", talking about the Jews. "He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? [Listen to verse 11] No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.

So, what the church decided was, "No, grace is the only way that we're saved," and they sent out a letter to all of these Gentile believers saying, "It's by grace alone you're saved. You don't have to be circumcised in order to be saved, also."

This was huge, and it was good news. It was welcomed by all these Gentile believers for a lot of different reasons. You can imagine, without the comforts of modern medicine, this was good news for those Gentile believers, but even more important than that, this was a picture of the purity of the gospel of grace being maintained in the first century.

So, what you've got is Paul addressing these false teachers that were in the church and making these claims. Judaizers were basically legalists. I want us to take this background of what the Judaizers were teaching in the churches in Galatia, because what they were teaching, then, is in many ways alive and well today. We are not...we don't have a bunch of Judaizers in this room, at least I don't think, and we're not having a lot of discussions and debates about circumcision, but there are...there are tendencies in the church that creep in that are just like what these Judaizers were doing that add to the gospel of grace and undercut the foundation of salvation.

I'm convinced that really every single one of us, every single Christ follower in this room, in some sense, is a recovering legalist, because all of us, whether or not we like to admit it or not, secretly, we think that there is something we can do in order to please God and be approved by God, or be accepted by God. Secretly, we think that if we have spent good time in prayer and in Bible study this week, that we come, and we sit in our seats tonight, and God is pleased with where we are. However, if we've not prayed like we should, or we haven't studied the Bible, or we've really wandered in some different areas of our life, that, in some sense, God is not pleased with us. That's based...this is a performance-based kind of faith that is really legalism, and I want us to make sure we know what legalism is, so we can call it when we see it, but also, I want us to be careful that we don't call something legalism that's actually not legalism.

Legalism Defined ...

Working in our own power.

So what is legalism? Legalism defined, number one, working in our own power...working in our power. This is part of what the Judaizers were teaching. They said, "Believe in Christ, and then you put your natural ability forward, and you begin to obey these different laws or rules or regulations. So, it's Christ and what man brings to the table. You trust in Christ, and then you do these things."

Now again, this is not exactly the same thing as we would talk about today with Judaizers and circumcision, or this or that, but let me give you this in its contemporary form. We talked about this some in the "Lifeblood" series earlier this year, but what about this idea that you pray a prayer, and you're saved by grace? "Now, what am I going to do? I've got

to figure out how to live out this Christian life, and so what do I need to do?" We begin to come up with a whole list of things. "The Christian life involves this, this, this, and this, and this. So, now I'm going to try to do all these things." What we do is we leave grace behind, the prayer we prayed, and now we're going to spend the rest of our life trying to figure out how to do this Christian life on our own. It's a contemporary form of working according to our own power...working in our own power to try to please God. It's legalism, working in our own power.

Working according to our own rules.

Second, working according to our own rules. What the Judaizers were doing, they were taking the gospel, new covenant picture in the New Testament, and they were bringing in rules and regulations from the Old Testament, adding on. God had established a new covenant with His people, and the terms of that covenant are explained here in the New Testament. What they were doing was they were adding the rules and regulations from another covenant and bringing it in here.

We...we do the same thing when we add rules and say, "Well, you need to do this, or this, and this, and this in order to be accepted by God," that are not outlined in the New Testament. If we were to say, "In order to be saved, you cannot eat hamburgers at McDonald's," then that would be adding to the rules. That would not be something that was spelled out in the new covenant. I mentioned that just because in India there was not a...not a lot of meat...a shortage of meat. Well, not a shortage, the sacred...the cow is sacred, so there's plenty of meat, just not edible meat. McDonald's, though, is there. They do not have hamburgers, they have lamb burgers. So, it's creative, not good, but creative...total side note.

The picture is...that's a silly example, but there are many examples of how we add...we add rules, and we say, "Well, we need to do this, and this, and this, and this, and this." We have to be careful, because as soon as we begin to add rules and say, "We've got to do this, and this, and this in order to be accepted by God," then we're undercutting the gospel, and we're becoming legalistic.

Now, I want us to be careful because whenever we talk about commands that we do have in the New Testament, and we say, "We need to obey these commands," that's not legalism; that's Christianity. So, when we looked, and a lot of the commands we looked at in the "Radical" series, is Jesus is telling us to do this, or Paul is telling us to do this, the Scripture saying, "Do this," then to talk about obedience to those commands is not legalism; it's Christianity. It's the core of the gospel, but you have to be careful not to add our own rules, working in our own power, according to our own rules.

Working to earn God's favor.

Third, this really the heart of legalism: working in order to earn God's favor...working in order to earn God's favor. The key thought in legalism is that if we do certain things, that we will have favor before God; we'll have credit before God. It's what the Judaizers were saying: "The more these rights or rules or regulations that you follow, the more credit you have before God."

It's the same thought I mentioned earlier that creeps into our minds when we think, "Well, if I...if I pray more, if I study the Bible more, and if I do these things in my Christian life, then I'll have favor before God, and if I don't, then He'll be disappointed with me." This is where we come face to face with the reality that Scripture teaches...the new covenant gospel teaches. The startling truth of Christianity is this: God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for Him. God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for

Him. God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for Him. The legalist in us rises up with that and says, "Surely there's something I'm supposed to do. I don't just sit back."

However, the reality that the gospel teaches is that God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance before Him. This is what Paul is so adamantly talking about in Galatians 1. He goes so far as to say, "If anybody says anything different...if anybody says anything but grace, even if an angel says it, if I say it...if an angel says it, let that angel be condemned. If I say it, let me be condemned." This is extremely serious.

That's why Martin Luther...Galatians, one of his favorite books, if not his favorite book in the Bible. His commentary on Galatians is famous. Think about Luther. Luther was living in a day, father of the Reformation, living in a day where he was surrounded by a church that was saying, "Work in your own power according to these rules." The church had added all kinds of rules: "Trust in Christ, yeah, trust in Christ and then do this, and do this, and this, and this, and this. Do it all in order to be accepted before God." Galatians was the rock that he stood on. Luther was a pretty...well, stubborn in many ways, hard-headed kind of guy, and he was proudly stubborn at this point.

I want you to listen to what he said, what he wrote down. He said, "Wherefore, God assisting me, my forehead shall be more hard than all men's foreheads. Yes," he said, "I am glad, even with all my heart in this point to seem rebellious and obstinate, and here I confess that I am and ever will be stout and stern, and will not one inch give place to any creature." He continued, "Let this be the conclusion of all, that we will suffer our goods to be taken away, our name, our life, and all that we have, but the gospel, our faith in Jesus Christ, we will never suffer to be wrested from us. Let every Christian here be proud and spare not, except he will deny Christ."

In other words, he said, "I'm standing on a gospel of grace, and I cannot be moved, and I proudly stand here." That's exactly what Paul does when he gets to the end of this book, and he says in Galatians 6 that, "We boast in the cross." We don't move from the cross, because this is where our faith rises or falls, and yet there is a tendency that will always be there, in our hearts and in the church, to pull us away from grace.

So, how does Paul address this, and how do you and I in our hearts address this performance-based mentality that creeps into our minds and our hearts? I want to show you, in answer to that question, two fundamental truths...primary, elementary in some ways, but glorious truths about the gospel that obliterate legalism.

Legalism Destroyed ...

The gospel is free.

So, we've got legalism defined; now legalism destroyed. Two truths: truth number one, the gospel is free; the gospel is free. Now, this is where we're going to camp out in verses 3, 4, and 5. I want you to listen to what Paul says. The very beginning, he starts, "*To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...*" Grace and peace...those two words are just pregnant with theological meaning, really. Grace and peace.

Grace: one of Paul's favorite words. He uses it a hundred different times in the New Testament, which is twice as much as all the other New Testament authors combined. He

uses this word often, and he does it all throughout Galatians. Let me show it to you. Just circle every time you see the word "grace." Let me take you on just a real quick tour here. You've got it there in verse 3...Galatians 1:3, "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ...*" Look down at verse 15. It says, "[*But*] when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his..." what? "...grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me..." So, there in Galatians 1:15.

Then over in Galatians 2:9...Galatians 2:9, "*James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.*" Anybody there? This is the audience participation part of our program. I tell you what, even if you're not like paying attention, just yell out, "Grace," whenever there's a pause, and you'll be right on. Okay? It'll sound like you're paying attention. So, "*grace given to me.*" They recognized the grace given to him.

Look down in Galatians 2:21, which we'll study more in depth next week. "*I do not set aside the...*" what? Grace, yes. "...*the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!*" "Don't set aside grace," Paul said. Look at Galatians 3:18: "[*For*] if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise." It's not just a New Testament thing; it's grace in the Old Testament now coming alive in the new covenant.

Then Galatians 5:4. This is when Paul really starts to get practical. Galatians 5:4, he says, "*You who are trying to be justified by law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace.*" "Don't fall away from grace," Paul says. Then, you get to the very end, Galatians 6:18. Now, this is the word that sounded the introduction for Paul in Galatians 1:3. Then, you get to Galatians 6:18, and he says, "*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers. Amen.*"

So, there's the picture over and over again. What Paul is saying in this book is grace is the scarlet thread of the gospel, so to speak, that permeates every facet of our faith. God's unmerited favor...that's what grace is, God's unmerited favor. What Paul is saying is that the gospel is free, salvation is free, mercy is free. God's pleasure in us is not based on our performance for Him. Instead, God's pleasure in us is based on His performance for us. Let that soak in. God's pleasure in us is not based on our performance for Him, but instead on His performance on our behalf.

Let me show this to you. How...what is God's performance? What does God do in grace in the gospel? Number one, God the Father has initiated our salvation. What you see is, "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" What you see is the Father and the Son both coupled here a couple different times in the opening part of this book. What you've got is the Father and the Son. What does the Father do? The Father has initiated our salvation. It says down at the end of verse 4, "...*according to the will of our God and Father.*" God, by His will, has designed the gospel to be completely dependent on His grace, on His initiating our salvation.

This is what Paul talks about. Go down to verse 13; see this illustrated. Paul starts talking about his story, his testimony of how he came to salvation. I want you to hear how he describes what he was doing, and then how he switches to describe what God did. Look in verse 13. Paul says, "[*For*] you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it." Paul was the terrorist, so to speak. Paul was the one who was going into villages and razing them. Paul was the one who was taking people and making sure that they were killed or hurt, suffering because of their faith in Christ. This was what Paul did, and then he says, verse 14, "*I was advancing in*

Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers."

He says, "I was doing all of these things, and then..." listen to this transition in verse 15, *"But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles..."* I love this picture. Paul says, "I was doing all of these things, but it was no match for the pleasure of a gracious God who invaded by life." It's what happened in Acts 9, when Paul was on the Damascus road.

Don't miss it. Paul had not gotten to the point where he was dissatisfied with Judaism and was looking for something else. Paul was intensely following Judaism, intensely persecuting the church, and when he was in no way seeking a gospel, the gospel sought him. Isn't that a great picture?

Ladies and gentlemen, we don't have, necessarily, the same story, exact testimony that Paul had, but we do have this: Ephesians 1. Every single follower of Christ in this room, we do have this: We have a God who chose us in Him before the creation of the world. In love, He predestined us to be adopted as His sons, according to His will and His purpose, to the glory of His grace. This is good news. Not one of us was seeking God; He sought us. Not one of us is in this room right now because of our own merit, because of what we earned to get here. We are here because mercy came running to you and me, because God in His grace has pursued us. That's good news; the gospel is free. It is a picture of a Father who initiates a relationship with us and pursues after us.

This is too good. Judaizers are saying, "No, that's not how it works." Paul goes to great lengths...and there's a lot of historical information in here that we're thinking, "What does this really have to do..." What Paul is doing is he's defending his apostleship and the message he has as an apostle, and he's saying, "This gospel was not invented by man. I didn't make this up," Paul says.

Verse 11, *"I want you to know, brothers, the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it."* Paul's making sure that it's clear: this gospel was not invented by man, it was revealed by God. "I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. God revealed it to me by His grace. I didn't make this up."

This gospel...you think about it, the gospel message, in and of itself, is completely contrary to the pride that grips all of our hearts; the idea that a perfectly holy God would become a man and live a perfect life on this earth, so that He might die on a cross for rebellious sinners who have worshipped other things instead of Him. So that anyone, no matter how deep or dark their past, no matter how willful and deliberate their rebellion was...anyone who simply trusts in Him would have eternal life and be reconciled to Him forever.

You don't...you don't make that up. This gospel is not invented by man, it's revealed by God, and Paul is saying, "If we abandon this gospel, we abandon God." That's why he uses the phrase, he said, "If you're abandoning this gospel, you're abandoning the very one who called you." You abandon the gospel, you abandon God, because God the Father is the initiator of our salvation.

God the Son has accomplished our salvation.

What has the Son done? God the Father is the initiator of our salvation; God the Son has accomplished our salvation. Come back to verse 3, *"Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins..."* You might underline that

phrase there in the beginning of Galatians 1:4, "*who gave himself for our sins.*" That is the core truth of the gospel, that salvation is not about what man can do, but salvation is all about...all about what Christ has done. Christ has done everything that is necessary for our salvation. He has given Himself for our sins, on behalf of our sins, in the place of our sins; the same word that's used over in Galatians 2:20; Galatians 3:13. Christ has given Himself on a cross in place of our sins, and the payment that is due you and me, and He has done everything necessary for our salvation. He has accomplished it for us.

Now, what you had was the Judaizers who were saying, "Yeah, Jesus died on the cross. Yes, you need to believe in Him, but you also need to do these things," and they were completely undercutting the significance of the death of Christ on a cross and what happened there by adding to it. This is where we have to be careful. We malign the gospel when we add to grace. Don't think that the Judaizers just came on the scene and said, "Hey, just want you to know, we've got some false teaching we'd like to bring into the church right now, and really, we should be condemned for what we're about to say, but maybe you'll believe it. You need to do this, and this, and this, and this, in addition to believing in Christ in order to be saved. So any takers?"

That's not the way they approached this picture. It was subtle, in the same way that, well, you've got a lot of pictures of cults overtly doing this in our culture today, but also how this creeps into the church and the legalistic ways we talked about adding to grace, saying, "Trust in Christ and do these things, and as long as you trust in Christ and do these things, you'll be acceptable before God." Whenever we say that, whenever we add to grace, then we malign the very foundation of the gospel.

Now, you think, "Well, what's so wrong with saying, 'Trust in Christ and do these things in order to be acceptable before God'? What's so wrong with doing those things?" This is where we have to realize...maybe if I could use the illustration from our brother in India, whose wife was killed. If I had a cup of pure drinking water to give to you to drink, and if right before I gave it to you, I put one drop of poison in it, would you still drink it? The obvious answer is, "No."

Well, it's mostly pure though, isn't it? It's just one drop amidst all the others that are in there, just one drop. This is the picture that Paul is giving us here. When you contaminate the gospel with just a little bit, you poison the whole picture; you contaminate the whole picture. We cannot undercut grace by adding one shred to it, not one shred of human work in order to be accepted before God. The gospel does not tell us to believe in Christ and do these things in order to be accepted before Him. The gospel says, "Your acceptance before God is based solely on the performance of Christ on a cross for your salvation."

Therefore, when you sit in this room tonight, regardless of how many times you've prayed this week, or how much you've studied the Bible, or how many people you've witnessed to, or what you've done this week, based on the work of Christ on a cross, you are accepted before God when you trust in Him. That and that alone is grace, and that and that alone is the gospel. It's what we live in. This is why we cling to Christ on a moment by moment by moment basis, because we need Him every moment to be accepted before God, and God's pleasure in us is based on His performance for us. So, when we trust in Christ, we cling to Christ, we know that we are right with God, we have peace before God, not based on one thing we have done, but based on the presence of Christ in our lives, and we don't want to add a single thing to that. We malign the gospel when we add to grace.

Now, that immediately opens up the gospel to accusations, which the Judaizers would make of lawlessness. "Well, if we don't have to do anything, then that just means we'll live

however we want; people will live however they want." They were discrediting Paul and his gospel on that grounds, and yes, grace like this is risky. This is where we need to remember, we malign the gospel when we try to add to grace; we misunderstand the gospel when we cheapen grace...when we cheapen grace.

You look down in Galatians 2:14. What you've got is Paul talking here about how grace, first of all, is not cheap; it's not cheap. It cost Christ His life on a cross. He gave Himself for our sins. However, not only is grace not cheap, but grace is changing...life changing...life transforming. You look in verse 14, Paul's talking, and we're going to look more at this specifically next week, but Paul's talking about Peter and some others and the way they were acting. He says, "*When I saw...*" listen to this phrase, "*...that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel...*" Did you catch that? There is a life, a way of living, that reflects the truth of the gospel, such that when the gospel is there, it automatically changes the way of life. So, your life can't be the same when it's been penetrated by this gospel of grace. It's not that you're adding to grace in order to be accepted before God, but it's the grace that makes us accepted before God that radically changes the way we live.

This is where...let's be honest, this is where things get really confusing in the New Testament, because we hear this truth, that it's only by grace that we're saved, and nothing that we do, but then we hear Jesus saying, like He did in some of those texts we looked at in the "Radical" series, "If you do not give up everything you have, you cannot be my disciple. Go, sell all you have and give to the poor, then you'll have treasure in heaven." In John 15, He says, "You are my friends if you do what I command." If we didn't know these words were coming from Jesus, we'd probably label Him a legalist. "What do you mean we have to give up everything we have; we have to do this and do this?"

This is where you get into some trouble, trying to quote Jesus in the church. This is the picture: Even though...even with Paul and James, for example, you've got Paul here talking about grace in Galatians. Then, you get over, and you've got Paul talking about how we're justified by faith alone. Then, you've got James over here that says, "Faith without deeds is dead. If you have no deeds to accompany your faith, then it's useless," James says.

So, which is it? There's a wrest and there's a tension here. That's why I mentioned Luther loved the book of Galatians. He didn't...he didn't really like the book of James. He wrote at one point, "Sometimes I just want to throw Jimmy into the stove." That's just not an option we have; we don't throw Jimmy into the stove; we have to deal with Jimmy over here. So, how do we deal with that? Is it faith, or faith and works? How does this...even with Paul...Paul here talking about grace, Ephesians 2:8, "*We're saved by grace through faith, not from ourselves, it's a gift of God so that no one can boast.*" All grace.

However, then you get to 2 Thessalonians 1:7, for example, and Paul says that Jesus is going to punish all those who do not obey the gospel. So...so, there's obviously a sense in which we can malign grace by adding to it, but there's also a sense in which we can misunderstand grace by cheapening it.

These aren't two different gospels; they're one gospel in the New Testament. There's not Jesus' gospel, and Paul's gospel, and Peter's gospel, and James' gospel. There's one gospel here. What we need to realize when we come to these passages in the New Testament is that these authors are addressing specific contexts, specific audiences. Paul is writing here in Galatians to a people who were adding to grace. So, we're going to see him emphasizing this picture of grace alone; saved and freed by grace alone. James is writing to people who were claiming to have faith, but had turned a deaf ear to the poor and needy, and he says,

"What's the deal here? It doesn't add up." To use the phrase from Galatians 2:14, "*You are not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.*"

So, how do we avoid cheapening grace and adding to grace? What Galatians is going to help us to do is to marvel at the gospel by trusting in grace, and the key word there is "trust." Trust in grace...faith. This is where we're going to talk...talking this week about how we're saved by grace alone. Actually, we're going to talk about how we're saved through faith alone, and how faith is the key, the God-ordained link, between God's grace and our salvation. Faith itself is a gift that God gives us, and this is what makes the whole picture good news and gospel. So, the gospel is free. It is wholly, completely, totally by grace. "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins...*"

God the Father has initiated our salvation, and God the Son has accomplished it in the cross. Not just is it free, though. The gospel...the second truth here, the gospel is freeing...freeing. Add an "I-N-G" on there, and we begin to see how the gospel is not just offered to us freely, but it brings freedom; it frees us.

Listen to what Paul says in Galatians 1:4, "*...the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age...*" He gave himself on a cross for our sins. Why? To rescue us from the present evil age. This is a great word, this picture of rescue. You go back to the book of Acts, and what you'll see is the people of Israel were rescued. It's the same word that's used there, from slavery in Egypt...freed from their slavery. When Peter's in prison in Acts 12, and he's rescued, he's freed. This is the word that's used when Paul's about to get lynched by a mob in the book of Acts, and he's rescued out from them, he's freed from them. That's the word.

This is the only time this word is used, right here in Galatians 1:4, to describe our salvation. It's a great picture of how we've been rescued. What are we being rescued from? The present evil age. Now, this word, this word for rescue, is not just being...to be delivered from, but it also means to be delivered from the power of something. The picture that Paul's given us here is that we're rescued from this present evil age, this world that we live in and all of its ways that are contrary to the Word.

Now, obviously, we're not rescued out of this world. We're still here, but we're rescued from the power of this world and the ways of this world, and what Paul is saying...and this is directly hitting on this accusation that his gospel leads to the license to sin and lawlessness...Paul is saying, "No, the gospel of grace is a gospel of rescue, where you are free, and you don't...you don't live like the world lives any more, and you don't think like the world thinks, and you don't love what the world loves, and you don't indulge in what the world indulges in, because you're freed from that; you're rescued from that. You're not in bondage to the ways of this world any more; you've been freed from that to live completely different. This is what Paul is going to talk about, especially in Galatians 5 and 6. He's going to show us how God puts His Spirit in us, and it's a Spirit of freedom that frees us to live the presence of Christ in us, according to the ways of Christ, speaking the words of Christ, and thinking the thoughts of Christ.

Christ is going to saturate all of who we are because we're freed from this world. The gospel is freeing. By His grace, the gospel frees us from sin in this world, from sinful attitudes, actions. Values that we used to live in, that we used to be in bondage to, we're now free from. "We're not just freed into nothingness," Paul says. "We're freed into Christ and the presence of Christ in us, now moving us to experience His life on a day-by-day-by-day basis."

This is the beauty of the gospel, and this is why...this is how we can look at those truths that we looked at in the "Radical" series and not walk away saying, "Legalistic." We would say that if we think that we're going to obey these commands in our own power, or if we come up with rules for how that looks, and if we think that if we do these things, we're going to have favor before God. Yes, that's legalism, but by the grace of Christ, when we hear tough commands in the Gospels, words from Jesus, and we can say, "I cannot do any of these things, but I can by the power of Christ that's in me; and I can, according to His Word that He's given to me, not my own rules, but His Word; and I can, not to earn favor before God, but because I already have favor before God in Christ."

Now, we're freed up. This is the beauty: now we live by grace. We're not just praying a prayer and leaving grace behind. Now, we're walking by grace. When we wake up in the morning, we need grace to breathe. We need grace to talk, and we need grace to walk, and we need grace to live out anything in the New Testament. We need grace to pray; we need grace to study the Word; we need grace to do anything, and moment, by moment, by moment, day by day, we are dependent on grace, and grace is saturating all that we are. Grace flows out of all that we are, because for the first time, by the grace of Christ, we are freed up to live like God has created us to live, not in bondage to this world any more.

Christian, if you are struggling with sin, persisting in a particular sin that you just can't seem to get out of, I remind you, you are freed from that sin. You're freed from the power, rescued from the dominion of that sin. It does not have dominion over you any more. By the power of Christ in you, and the grace of Christ in you, not based on your ability to work really hard when you leave and try to overcome that, but based on the power of the grace of Christ who has conquered that sin on a cross, you are free. You're free from guilt from sin. There's no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. The law of the Spirit of life has set you free from the law of sin and death. You are free from any kind of defeated Christianity. There's no such thing; we have grace. Every moment we have grace.

The gospel's free, and it's freeing. By His grace, we are free from sin in this world, and by His grace we are free to share with this world. Paul comes to verse 5, and he says, "*to whom be glory, forever and ever. Amen.*" I want you to go with me over to verses 15 and 16. I want you to see this. I want you to see how God's saving Paul was not intended just to affect him. Listen to verse 15. Paul says, "*God set me apart from birth, called me by His grace, and was pleased to reveal his Son in me.*" Three things there. "God set me apart, called me, and was pleased to reveal His Son in me."

Then, he says, "so that," purpose clause. In other words, here's the why. Paul, why did God set you apart? Why did God call you, and why did God reveal Christ to you, of all people? Why did God reveal Christ to you? Paul says, "So, that I might," what? "Preach Him among the Gentiles, among the nations." I want you to see here in this little phrase, hidden away in the middle of Galatians 1, the blessing of God connected with the purpose of God.

Why was Paul saved? Why did God shower such astounding grace on Paul? He did it for a reason. Why? So that Paul would be a proclaimer of grace to the nations. Not so that Paul would sit back in a seat in a church auditorium the rest of his Christian life, soaking in grace. No, there was a deeper purpose here. He had received grace for a reason, for a purpose, and that was to preach grace, to proclaim grace to others...good news to others. It was private revelation for public communication. You see the picture there? I would say that the picture here is the same picture that is repeated all across this room.

We celebrate the fact that God has set us apart; He's called us by His grace. He's revealed Christ to us. Let this soak in: 600 million people in northern India, less than one percent

Christian. Why were you and I born into a country where the gospel is so easily heard? You can't help sitting in India thinking, "Why was I not born in this slum?" Or, "Why was I not born in this setting, where there is no gospel?" You know there's no merit in you, there's nothing you had to do with that. It's all by grace.

You and I have this gospel. By His grace, we have this gospel, and that is cause for celebration. It is cause for praise to God, thanksgiving to God, but it is also responsibility. God has given us grace in the gospel for a reason, so we might proclaim this gospel, not so that we would sit back and hoard this gospel. No, so that we would go into the places where we live and work, and places where it's not easy to go, and where it's probably even dangerous to go, and we would proclaim this gospel because it is good news; it is the best news in the world. It is great and glorious news that you and I have to proclaim.

The reason we have it is so that we might proclaim it. We're free to share with this world. Imagine taking about an hour trip into a remote village, now over in northeastern India, near Nepal, and you go through these villages, village after village, and you think that you've gotten just about to the end of the world, and then another village comes up over here...remote, isolated villages. You finally get to this one particular village, and you get out there and you go to this home outside, and they ask you to sit down, and they bring you tea. So hospitable, and bring you food, which we won't talk about what that food was; it would ruin the beauty of the story.

However, you sit there and you talk with the folks who are there, and one by one, people from the village, men and women, come, and they gather there in a small group, about 30 people. You have the opportunity to stand up in front of those 30 people, and not one of those people has ever heard the gospel before. This is the first time they're ever hearing the news about Jesus, and you have the opportunity to stand up and to look at those 30 people in the eye and to say to a people, who for generations and generations and generations, have been working to make peace with God. You have the opportunity to look them in the eye and say, "You're free; you don't have to work any more; you don't have to try to earn your way; you don't have to try to follow rules and regulations to try to get to God. I've got good news, He has made His way to you. He has come to you; He's come to you in the person of Jesus Christ, and He is not one of 33 million gods. He is one God, the one God, the Creator God who has made His way to you not based on anything you have done, but by His grace. He will save you by His grace and give you peace with God at this moment, simply by trusting in Him."

That's good news, and it's good news not just for these men and women in India. It's good news for every single person in this room. No matter what your past looks like; no matter what your present looks like; no matter what you have struggled with, sin wise, in your life over the last week; no matter what you were struggling with at two in the morning last night on the Internet; no matter what you were doing in your home or your workplace over the last week; no matter how filthy your sin may seem, or how unworthy you may feel before God, the reality is this: You are free, ladies and gentlemen.

You are free by the grace of Christ. He has forgiven you by His grace, and there is nothing you can do to earn pleasure before Him, because He is pleased in you based solely on your identification with Jesus Christ. "*He has taken your sins and removed them as far as the east is from the west,*" Psalm 103. Isaiah 43, "*He remembers your sins no more.*" "*He cleanses you of all unrighteousness,*" 1 John 1:9. 1 Peter 2 says, "*He makes you a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, who once did not have mercy, and now you have mercy.*" Romans 9 says, "*You have mercy, not based on your desire effort, but based on the desire of God and the effort of God.*" He has pursued His way

to you, mercy has come running to you, and you are free. By His grace, you're free; this is good news. It is the best news in the world, and it is the only way we can have peace before God, by grace. By grace, and grace alone.

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