

Deliverance From This Present Evil Age
Galatians 1:1-5

This Week's Prayer
Requests:

Memory Verse: Galatians 2:20 - "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Text: "Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), and all the brethren who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

Monday

Think of a story of deliverance that you have heard before that really spoke to you. What happened?

The people of Le Chambon, a very poor and small farming village in France, led by their pastor Andre Trocme, refused to accept the invincibility of evil and brute power of the Nazi regime, when it overran their country. These farmers, peasants and housewives met together with the pastor of the church in their little community, and they decided as a congregation to become rescuers, like Christ their Lord and Savior, who had given His life to rescue them from sin.

Over the next several years, the people of this village took in Jewish refugees from all over Europe. They risked their lives, and the lives of their families, to give protection to Jews fleeing the Nazis. They hid them. They fed them. They snatched them secretly out of large deportation groups before they could be shipped back to the death camps in Germany. The congregation of this little village developed a network to smuggle them out of the country. By the time France was liberated, the farmers, peasants and housewives of the small farming village had saved thousands of Jews from death.

Pastor Andre Trocme wrote the following in February, 1943:

"...in the course of the summer we have been able to help about sixty Jewish refugees in our own home; we have hidden them, fed them, plucked them out of deportation groups, and often we have taken them to a safe country. You can imagine what struggles—with the authorities—what real dangers this means for us: threats of arrest,

submitting to long interrogations...”

Magda Trocme, the pastor’s wife, explained why the people of her community risked their lives to protect the Jews:

“Those of us who received the first Jews did what we thought had to be done—nothing more complicated... How could we refuse them?... The issue was Do you think it is unjust to turn in the Jews or not? Then let us try to help!”

Hanne Liebmann was one of those who was saved by the good people of Le Chambon:

“We came to Le Chambon, and we were received very wonderfully with a good meal, with stuff we hadn’t seen in a long, long time.. . . When the French came to round up Jewish people in August-September, 1942, ... we were hidden by farmers, they took care of us. They protected us. I don’t think any of them were ever reimbursed. And food actually was very tight.. Le Chambon was a very poor farming village, nothing much grows; so whatever they had, they shared with us. And if you are a family with small children and you take in one or two more mouths to feed, it is a sacrifice. And they didn’t mind sacrificing, or even putting their lives at risk for us...”

How has the rescue Christ provides impacted you?

Can you imagine what the sacrifice and efforts of the people of Le Chambon meant to those who were rescued by them? We are all occasionally captivated by stories of rescue and courage especially when they involve such risk and sacrifice against such overwhelming odds as in the case of the men and women of Le Chambon. But the greatest story of rescue that has ever been told, the very story that captivated Andre Trocme and his congregation, the story that motivated them to risk everything to save others, is the story of the Lord Jesus’ “rescue” of all who trust in Him “from this present evil age” when He “gave Himself for our sins” on the cross.

As you look at the greeting Paul gives to the Galatian churches, you can see that he has already gotten down to the business at hand. He summarizes the entire message of the book, in these few words, namely that he is first a true apostle with authority given directly from God to speak on His behalf, and secondly that the true basis of salvation before God is Jesus Christ and His work on the cross. Paul takes these two issues (the authority God had given Him and the true basis of salvation) and unfolds them in that order throughout the rest of the letter.

He concludes his greeting with this marvelous phrase, “that He might deliver [or rescue] us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.” And the joy of that thought is momentarily so overwhelming, that the great Apostle is compelled to linger for a moment in pure doxology, “to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

So Paul is laying out for the Galatians and us in summary form what he will develop throughout the rest of the letter, specifically the means by which God He has brought about deliverance for sinners, men and women like you and I, the means by which God has brought His grace to bear and given peace to the lives of those who are saved. This week, we will focus primarily on two ways mentioned in this text that God has provided for the deliverance of sinners.

But take a moment to reflect. How did God first bring to you the knowledge of His deliverance in Christ? What has this meant for your life? Write your answer in the space below:

Tuesday

The first means that God has used to bring about our deliverance according to our text for this week is this:

1. God has provided for our deliverance through the teaching of His authoritative messengers (vv. 1-2).

What does the word Apostle mean?

Verse one begins, “Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead).” The word apostle means simply one who is sent, and there are two kinds of apostles mentioned in the New Testament. There are apostles with a big “A” (if you will), who are specifically called apostles of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, and there are apostles with a little “a” called apostles of the churches, who were commissioned and sent

out with specific missions from churches. For example, in Philippians Epaphroditus is called an apostle, because he was sent by the Philippian church to bring a monetary gift of support to Paul.

Read Luke 6:13.
What is the significance of this verse?

Now to be an apostles with a big “A” in the New Testament is something entirely different from simply being a congregational representative. Neither is it the simply another name for disciples in general as we see from Luke 6:13, where Christ specifically set apart some men from His disciples and “designated” them as Apostles. No, an Apostle, with a big “A,” is something special.

What are the qualifications of an Apostle?

We see from Scripture that these Apostles had to fulfill very specific qualifications: 1) They had to be personal witnesses to the resurrection of the Lord. They had to have seen Him. For instance, Paul says in 1 Cor. 9:1, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” And in 1 Corinthians 15:8-9 he says, “Last of all as to one untimely born, Jesus appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles unfit to be called an apostle for I persecuted the church of God.” 2) They had to be personally commissioned and sent by the Lord Jesus to speak with His authority, (e.g. Acts 1:1-8) and 3) They were granted the ability to do signs and wonders to confirm their message. The Bible calls these the signs of a true apostle in 2 Cor. 12:12. And we see these things again and again in the New Testament.

Are there any “Apostles” in terms of the special office designated by the Lord alive today? How do we know?

Now, Beloved, the office of the Apostles was a one time deal. They were given specifically to lay the foundation of the church according to Eph. 2:20, and after their work was done there was no more need of the office. Indeed, the fact that Paul says he was appointed an apostle “last of all” in 1 Cor. 15, ἔσχατον, the final, the end, the last of all, means plainly that no Apostles would be appointed after him. Further, it was the apostles’ responsibility in laying the foundation of the church to give the church its authoritative doctrine, its authoritative teaching according to Eph. 3:5. It was their responsibility to mediate and affirm the authoritative word of God, the Scriptures, a mission given to them specifically by the Lord Jesus Christ in John 14:25-26, and empowered and carried out through them by the Holy Spirit. That work was completed with the death of John, and there have been no big “A” apostles since.

This is important, Beloved, because every once in a while a man will come along claiming to be an Apostle to the church. Now I don’t know what all of them may mean when they use that term, but I am fearful of what some of them mean.

Interestingly, when Eve and I moved from the Air Force to seminary, we had to put a large portion of our household goods into storage. In the storage facility where we rented space, there was a parking lot for people to rent spaces for boats, RVs, and that sort of thing. And I was always somewhat amused when we went, because parked in one of these spaces was a big tour bus with a sign across it that read in all capitals, “BILLY JOE BOB, HOLY APOSTLE MINISTRIES.”

Why is it so important to know who the Apostles were?

Now, I’m not making that up. That’s not a pastoral substitution to protect the not-so-innocent. The guy’s name actually was “Billy Joe.” I just added the “Bob.” But folks, the words of Billy Joe do not come to us with divine authority. His teaching is not normative for all of life and godliness. It is not binding on me or anyone else. But the words of those men specifically commissioned by Christ, and given to lay the foundation of the church and mediate to us the inspired word of God, Himself, Apostles, “not from man nor through man,” the word of those men are in a completely different category.

In Jewish terms, Beloved, the Apostles were the Shaliach of God, just as the prophets were who gave us the Old Testament. That word means that when they spoke in the Spirit, they spoke with the authority of God, Himself. It was as if God, Himself, were standing there speaking and writing the words they spoke and wrote as they did so in the Spirit.

What is the danger of another without proper Apostolic authority, being given such authority?

Notice what Paul says in verse one, he was an apostle “not from man nor through man.” In other words, Paul did not obtain this office through any human methods, or any human decision or any human agency whatsoever, but he received it straight from God. And it was through the means of His chosen, authoritative messengers, through their preaching and teaching, that God has chosen to communicate His word, the good news of the Gospel, that we might put our faith in Jesus Christ and be saved.

In other words, Paul understood that he had a unique place in redemptive history, that God had given him an authority that would not be passed on in another person, but only in a book as the Old Testament Scriptures were. And Paul was keenly aware that as an apostle he had the authority to represent Christ. This authority rested on his Apostleship: He had seen the risen Christ; Christ had personally commissioned and empowered him to be His representative to preach and teach with His personal authority; and as 1 Cor. 2:13 says, the Spirit of Christ worked within him by revelation to guide his words in God’s truth.

Wednesday

We were reflecting yesterday on Galatians 1:1 and Paul's concern to put forth his apostolic authority. Now, it's important to point out that Paul's concern for his authority in this verse is not simply to draw attention to himself, out of some sense of ego or pride. Rather, he has a deep and legitimate concern to instruct the readers then and today as to the nature of apostleship. I emphasize this because it is absolutely fundamentally important.

Why must Paul defend his office as an apostle?

The very Gospel message itself is at stake in this issue, (which is, of course, Paul's entire point). If Paul were not an apostle, then those who read this letter were free to reject what he said. If Paul were not an apostle, then nobody should feel bound to bow beneath his instruction. The reason he is compelled to defend his authority is not pride or some other base motive, but because of the crucial, eternally critical message that God told him to bring, a message that makes a difference between heaven and hell for the souls of men and women throughout all generations in every nation.

What are some ways that people approach the Scripture? What are some of the dangers in various approaches?

Paul's teaching to us is not like vegetables. You understand what I mean? When you were a child, you were often required to eat your vegetables. But now that you're an adult, if someone hands you a plate with a messy pile of canned spinach, or asparagus or some other nasty green aberration masquerading as food, you can simply take your fork, move it to the side and say, "I don't prefer that." Now that's perfectly acceptable in our society with regard to vegetables. No sane person could possibly fault you for such behavior. But Paul's not so subtle point in verse one, is that his message is not like vegetables. His message is not a matter of preference.

Apostolic authority is divine authority. Because it is divine authority, we must submit to it. Do you understand that? People sometimes come to me and say things like this, "I don't have a problem with the Sermon on the Mount, but I don't like the epistles." Listen, Beloved, your Bible is not a smorgasbord. It is not as though you can pick and choose a few things you like and ignore the rest. The Bible is Divine authority from the God who made you, gives you breath, and life, and all things, and will one day call you to account.

What are the implications of Paul's Apostolic

Now we need to stop for a moment, and absorb the implications this truth has for us. In a few weeks we will talk about how Paul argues for this authority, but for now let us just assume that it is true. Do you see

authority?

what this means? It means that when you read Galatians you are hearing Christ. An apostle speaks with the message of the one who sent him. Galatians is the very word of the King of kings. Now how many of us are tempted to cry out to Jesus for some message, some revelation, some dream or vision, but we make almost no serious effort to understand the words of Scripture, the very words of Christ right in their own hands. How many come and seek counsel and advice, but if you ask them if they've searched the Scripture related to that issue, they begin to make excuses and get a little nervous. There isn't a lot of disciplined submission to the words of the apostles in the contemporary American church.

How should we handle the difficult teachings of Scripture?

Or if a person is confronted with a difficult truth in the Scripture, how many times are they quick to dismiss and say something like. "Well you know, that's just Paul. It isn't Jesus," as if the two of them might have a different message! And as if such a person is able to discover and judge difference! But you see, there is no "That's just Paul" attitude allowed by the Scripture, for the words of the Apostle are the words of Christ, who personally commissioned and taught him what to say. That idea simply won't do, if you really want to be true to the Bible and the Lord Jesus. This is His spokesman. When Paul speaks, whether it is about male and female roles in the church, or worship, or tongues, or marriage, or whatever, it is not optional for you to listen.

This is also why "red letter" bibles are sometimes misleading, Beloved, because they subtly suggest that the words of Jesus spoken through his three year ministry, put in red ink, are somehow more precious and more valuable, perhaps even more inspired than the words simply printed in black ink. But the words in black are just as much the words of Christ as the words in red. For all Scripture is God-breathed. And for a red letter Bible to really be true to the heart of Christ, it would have to print every word from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21 in red. All of the words of Christ written in the New Testament were mediated by the Apostles incidentally, the content of Mark coming from Peter and the content of Luke and Acts authorized and given the status of Scripture by both Peter and Paul together, when they were in Rome according to the testimony of the church fathers.

How should we handle Scripture on a daily basis?

What does this mean for us practically? Simply this: we are not only to say we believe the Bible is authoritative, but also submit our minds and hearts to it by reading with precision and care and disciplined attention to the meaning of words in context, the intended relationships among sequences of phrases, and the coherent thread of thought through whole

paragraphs. This is not optional. This is not some esoteric game for scholars. It is a matter of humility and submissiveness to the Word of God for all His children. It is the only way to own up to the implications of Galatians 1:1, “Paul an apostle, not from men or through man but through Jesus Christ.” This letter is the word of the living Christ through His authoritative representative to you.

If we believe that and count Jesus as Lord, we will not be satisfied with a text message or with imprecise, hazy notions about the meaning of words. We will study and analyze and define, and diagram, and write, and research, and ponder, and meditate, and muse, and stare, and make connections, and synthesize until the mind of the apostle is lucid, sharp, clear, and unavoidable. **And then we will bow down to the ground on our face before the Lord and joyfully exchange our thoughts, our ideas and our attitudes for His and we will gain the mind of Christ.** In truth we must read, and we must read with great, loving and devoted care, if we would be truly devoted to the heart of Christ.

Thursday

What is the difference between the use of “churches” in verse 2 and the use of “church” in verse 13?

Moving on in our meditation over Galatians 1:1-5, you will note in verse 2 that this letter is written “to the churches” with the word “churches” being plural here.

Now this is important to notice and not just to skim over it because it teaches us something. We can see what it teaches more clearly if we compare for a moment the use of the plural in verse 2 and the use of the singular term “church” in verse 13, where Paul says, “For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.”

The difference is simply this. In verse 13, Paul clearly refers to the universal church, which he sought to destroy, namely all those who by repentance and faith had been placed in Christ. While in verse 2 Paul is distinguishing between the church universal and local groupings of God’s people, local assemblies of believers in Galatia.

Is the focus of the New Testament more on the local church or the universal church?

I sometimes hear people saying that there is very little instruction on the local church in the New Testament and the main thrust of the New Testament is directed towards this somewhat fuzzy concept of the church universal that extends through all time beyond all national and geographical boundaries. But nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, of the 109 references to the church in the New Testament, 100 of

those refer to the church expressed in smaller local assemblies.

It is this church that has regular meetings (1 Cor. 5:4; 11:19, 33-34; 14:19; 16:2; Heb. 10:25); local officers (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Eph. 4:8-11), observable public ordinances (1 Cor. 11:23-34); and discipline for its individual members (Matt. 18:15-17; 1 Cor. 5:4). Moreover, any attempt to ignore the local expression of God's church with a view towards the greater universal church completely misses the heart of the New Testament in this area. The universal church exists as a biblical concept, yes, but it is through the local assemblies of believers that God has determined to accomplish his work in this world (e.g. Eph. 4:12-13)

The whole instruction on the local church in the New Testament is significant and it is clear. And when Paul went on his missionary journeys, one of the results was that not only were people converted to faith in Jesus Christ, but also those men and women were then gathered together in local congregations.

Is the Scripture impersonal to you, or is it something more?

Why do I bother pointing this out? I said earlier this week that sometimes people find themselves longing for some kind of special "word of God" directed to them. They are desperate, essentially, for some kind of experience. And I've discovered in counseling with such people, that not only does Scripture not fill this perceived void in their life during their prayer and worship times, but they also, quite often, have a very unnatural view of Scripture. They see it as something impersonal and distant from their own lives.

How do you let the Scripture speak to you?

So that, when Paul says, as he does in verse 3, "Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ," they don't make the connection that this was a statement from an inspired author speaking for God to local churches, just like their own church, filled with men and women, just like them. Because of this, they do not then make the simple connection that these are God's very words to their own individual hearts as well (as 2 Tim. 3:16-17 makes explicit). They fail to see, then, that God has spoken a word them, and that it is a word of "Grace to you, and peace from God," if they will but humble themselves, hear, and believe.

I have often heard the Bible compared to a series of love letters by various preachers, and I think that is a very useful way to think of Scripture as we meditate on verses like 2 and 3 in our text for this week, especially in light of what we saw in verse 1.

Eve and I used to write love letters back and forth when we were dating, and when we were married and separated that first year while I was in the Air Force. When her letters came, I would pull out her wedding portrait and set it beside me. Then I would sit down and I would read her letters so carefully. I would examine what she was saying and try to picture the attitude behind it. Was she smiling when she wrote this or a little upset? What exactly did she mean when she said this? What was on her mind here? Why does she connect these two things together? What does this tell me about what is really important to her?

After that, I would save them in a box, a treasure box for love letters, and I would bring them out again to read over and over. Why? Because I longed for her; I longed to know her heart. Do you see the connection? The words of the Apostle are not meant to be junk mail, some kind of colorful advertisement that you glance at and throw in the trash. They are not something impersonal to you. As they were written to the individual churches and members of those churches in Galatia and elsewhere, so they are written to you. They are love letters, and every word and every phrase is so important, because they reveal the heart of our true love, Jesus Christ.

Yes, He is our Lord and Master. Yes He is to be given all authority, worship and glory. Yes He is our judge who will call us to account. And yes He is also our love, our one true love, if you are His.

Friday

God has not only provided for our deliverance through the teaching of his appointed and authoritative messengers. We also see this truth:

2. God has provided for our deliverance through the work of Jesus Christ (vv. 3-5).

“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever.”

Just look at that sentence, Beloved. There is so much here it is incredible.

Who gave Himself for us?

When it says that He gave does that mean it was voluntary or involuntary?

How much does it say that He gave?

Does that mean he held anything back?

What is the implication of that gift?

When it says, “for our sins” in verse 4, what does that say about us?

What does it say about the nature of our sin that it would require such a gift to pay for?

Why did He have to give Himself according to verse 4?

What does the word “deliver” mean?

That word “deliver” means to rescue from danger. Peter used it to describe his deliverance by the angel from prison and Luke uses it to describe the rescue of Paul by the Roman Commander from a mob that was about to tear him to pieces. It is a rescue like a firefighter who runs into a burning building to carry out a person trapped inside and in the midst of fighting the fire and getting the person to safety, he is killed, losing his life and sacrificing himself to rescue another. It’s that kind of rescue.

And how does Christ feel about the present world system, the way that those of this world live and act in this period of time ? How is it described in verse 4?

Ought we to love those things that the one who gave Himself to deliver us considers evil?

Now by implication, what is made possible by the deliverance of Christ?

In conclusion then, Beloved, Christ is the appointed means of our deliverance according to the will of God (verse 4). If you are trying to be saved through human effort as the Judaizers were trying to convince the Galatians they needed to be, then you have no grace because grace is a gift. It does not come by works or it would not be grace but wages. The two are antithetical; they are opposites. If you trust in human effort rather than the work of Christ, there is not only no grace, but there is no peace either. Because God will not be at peace with you and you can

never have certainty that you have done enough.

This deliverance you will note is a spiritual deliverance. Colossians 1:13 says, “God has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son.” In 2 Timothy 4:10 Paul writes, “Demas has deserted me in love with this present age.”

Deliverance from this present age, then, means a changed heart and a changed mind, a change of heart so that we love a new age. We love things much higher than this world has to offer. As Paul says in Romans 12:2, “Do not be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” Deliverance from the present evil age means freedom not to think like this age thinks. It means freedom from slavery to fear and guilt and anger and pessimism and selfishness and greed and the pride that characterizes this evil age. It means the freedom to be appalled at the mind set and wickedness of the evil around us such as abortion and alcohol abuse and perverse sex and those who approve of such things. Deliverance means the freedom to be different and to make an eternal difference in the lives of others. Deliverance means the freedom to truly love others.

If you have been delivered, do not seek glory for yourself as a Judaizer would saying, “I did it,” but give glory to God, as verse five ends “to whom be glory forever and ever. Truly.” “Amen” means “truly.” Giving glory to someone other than Christ for your deliverance, or taking glory to oneself is simply false. For deliverance comes from God alone.

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