

The True Gospel
Galatians 1.1-10
September 2

Several New Testament scholars refer to Galatians as "The Charter of Christian Liberty." The Greek noun, adjective, and verb translated with a variant of our English term "freedom" occurs ten times in this short letter. The message of Galatians focuses on freedom in Christ – freedom from the penalty and power of sin, freedom from legalism, and the freedom of life in the Spirit. God miraculously freed Paul, and now this free man fights vigilantly for the true gospel that provided his liberty.

The opening verses of Galatians provide a helpful outline of the book (Gal. 1.1-5). The introductory verses contain three themes: apostleship (1.1), the death of Christ for our sins (1.4), and rescues from this present evil, enslaving age (1.4). Galatians 1-2 provides a defense of Paul's apostolic message. Galatians 3-4 explains the death of Jesus as His bearing the curse of our sins through His death on the cross (3.13-14). Galatians 5-6 proclaims our freedom to serve one another in Christ (5.13) as well as life in the Spirit.

What did Paul communicate as the essential message of The True Gospel?

First, Paul proclaimed the source of the True Gospel (Gal. 1.1-2). "The churches of Galatia" likely were churches Paul and Barnabas started on the first missionary journey. False teachers infiltrated the church and proclaimed a different message (Gal. 1.6). Consequently, Paul did not express thanksgiving for his readers as he normally did in his letters because false teaching endangered the gospel the true gospel message. The gospel did not arise from human origin (Gal. 1.11); the gospel is a revelation of (or from) Jesus Christ (Gal. 1.12). The Gospel neither came "from man" (the idea of source) nor "by men" (the idea of agency). Paul's message of the gospel had its source of origin in God's action "to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1.16). The risen Christ commissioned Paul as an apostle (representative, authorized agent) to serve as an authoritative communicator of true gospel.

Second, Paul defined the True Gospel (Gal. 1.3-4). The true gospel is a message of "grace" and "peace." The first word of the message of Galatians is "grace" (Gal. 1.3); the last message of Galatians is "grace" (Gal. 6.18). Grace and peace together summarize the message of the True Gospel. Grace is God's unmerited favor, and goodwill demonstrated in the saving work of Jesus. Peace describes the outcome of grace – restoration of wholeness and a personal relationship with God. The True Gospel is not a message of what humans can do or achieve; the True Gospel celebrates what Christ did on our behalf. First, the true gospel is *costly*; Jesus gave Himself. Second, the true gospel *reveals* the human predicament; the number one problem for humans is our sin problem. Third, the true Gospel proclaims the *substitutionary* death of Jesus. Jesus died "for" our sins. On the cross, Jesus bore our sins in that He suffered the punishment due to us. He received the punishment we rightly deserved. Fourth, the true gospel celebrates the *purpose* of the true gospel. The gospel rescues believers from the penalty of sin and the dominance of the power and of sin. Galatians 1.4 affirms the gospel if free and freeing.

Third, Satan has attempted to corrupt the message of the true gospel from its beginning (Ga. 1.6-9). Paul was dumbfounded that the Galatians quickly deserted the grace gospel for a different gospel that produced disorder (literally “shaking fear.”). A false gospel provides no assurance and results in fear. False teachers infiltrated the church and taught a message that repudiated Paul’s message of salvation by grace in favor of a message of works. This false gospel affirmed that salvation is Jesus plus works, in this case, Jesus plus circumcision. This “other gospel” – literally a non-gospel according to Paul – denied salvation by grace in favor of salvation by works. The term “turn from,” described one who changed allegiance such as a military deserter. A spiritual deserter abandons the God of grace.