

Galatians 1:1-9

Make It Clear!

Last Sunday morning we awakened to the shocking news that a magnitude 9.0 earth quake, centered about 100 miles off the coast of Indonesia had caused tsunamis that killed thousands.

The head of Italy's National Geophysics Institute said the quake even disturbed the Earth's rotation. It moved the entire island of Sumatra about 100 feet toward the southwest. Richard Gross of Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena says it may have shortened the day by 3 microseconds.

The news reports said, "Officials conceded Monday that they failed to issue broad public warnings immediately after a massive undersea earthquake, which could have saved countless lives from the subsequent giant waves that smashed into nine countries as far away as Africa."

"Waves began pummeling southern Thailand about one hour after the earthquake. After 2 1/2 hours, the torrents had traveled some 1,000 miles and slammed India and Sri Lanka."

You can't warn people about earthquakes but you can about tsunamis. For tens of thousands of people the warning never came.

Sometimes, not having information can mean the difference between life and death. Sometimes not having information can make the difference between heaven and hell.

This morning we're beginning a series in a book that has been called "spiritual dynamite." It's almost impossible to handle it without having some explosions.

We're going to take a fresh look at the New Testament book of Galatians.

It was Galatians that took a young Catholic monk named Martin Luther and made him the greatest force in the protestant reformation. Luther would eventually write this about Galatians, "It is my epistle. To it I am as it were in wedlock. It is my Katherine von Bora." Katherine von Bora is the nun that Luther married after being forced out of the Catholic church.

It was a sermon on Galatians that brought peace to the heart of a young man named John Wesley. John was the founder of the Methodist church. Of course, originally it was a conservative, Bible-believing church.

This short letter from an apostle named Paul to some churches in Asia Minor has been called "The Magna Charta of Christian Liberty," and "The Christian Declaration of Independence."

Obviously this is a book of the Bible that's influenced a lot of people in the past. But like the rest of the Bible it's not just for people in the past.

The Bible is a living book. It's God's message to people in every generation. It's God's message to us this morning.

Here's what makes the book of Galatians so challenging. It answers basic, heart questions that we all have: "Where does real happiness come from?" "How do I find peace?" "Where do I find true freedom?"

Galatians is God's statement on authentic freedom.

Eugene Peterson has written a book called "Reflections of a Free Life." In it he says, "Actually the lives most people live are filled with impotence, boredom, obscurity, and hassle. Living in the 'Land of the Free' has not made us free. We are a nation of addicts and complainers. Being provided with freedom of religion has not made us free. Coercive cults and enslaving superstitions continue to proliferate. Even going to church and hearing Jesus' promise, '...if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed,' hasn't made us free. Our churches are filled with the obsessive-compulsive, the inhibited, the fearfully defensive- enough of them to provide outside observers with a stereotype."

Felix Le Dantec, the French biologist wrote about 100 years ago: "Man is a conscient puppet who has the illusion of freedom."

Something is wrong when we say how important freedom is to us but so few of us really have it.

Here's where the book of Galatians becomes intensely practical for us.

The Bible says that true peace can only come one way. Real freedom can only come one way. It doesn't come through the latest psychological fad. It doesn't happen when we get enough money or reach our success or education goals.

The Bible says that true peace and freedom come through Jesus Christ.

The Book of Galatians is simply the clearest, boldest, most comprehensive statement on biblical freedom you'll ever find.

In our shallow, face paced world, that's filled with all kinds of misinformation, we need what's in this book more than ever.

We need the information. We need it made clear and plain. And we need it now.

Open Bibles to Gal 1 pg 1033

I. The Bible Was Written With The Authority Of God

Read vs 1 & 2

Some of the more liberal critics of the Bible have tried to deny the authenticity of many of the New Testament books. One of the more extreme attacks was led by a German named Baur in the 1800's. He said that only 4 NT books were actually written by the Apostle Paul. But even he accepted Galatians as authentic.

In other words, even the most extreme critics realize that the evidence points to Paul as the author.

His audience was made up of several church congregations in Asia Minor, and he was writing from Corinth about 52 AD. This is only 20 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let's start with a brief back ground of the book so we have a feel for what's going on and then we'll look at the opening verses in detail.

Paul was bought up as an orthodox Jew. He was trained in the finest schools by well know Rabbis. When Jesus was crucified and Christianity started spreading he was the biggest critic.

This Paul, or Saul, as he was called then, went around the country side arresting Christians and generally making life as unbearable as he could for them.

The problem was that his own knowledge of the OT prophecies of Messiah, as well as what he saw in the Christians he was persecuting, was getting the best of him.

Eventually Saul became a believer in Jesus and traveled throughout the Roman empire starting churches.

When he showed up in the region known as Galatia he found people ready to accept the truth of Jesus Christ. These were non Jews who didn't have any Bible knowledge. They were people steeped in the pagan worship of a number of gods and goddesses.

Paul's message was simple: We're all sinners before God. Our sin has earned us judgment. Jesus came to be our Savior by taking our sin upon Himself. And all who trust Him as Savior are forgiven and free.

He found the people there were excited about the clarity of the Gospel. They had peace and joy and forgiveness because of the Good News.

Their pagan worship had left them empty. Finally they found real fulfillment.

But then something happened. Paul left to start other churches. He was a church planting missionary. After he was gone some men came down from Judea. These were guys who said they had been sent by James and the other Apostles in Jerusalem.

Basically they told the Galatians that Paul had only given them half the story. They said, "We're here to give you the whole deal. We really represent Christianity, Paul's just kind of out there on his own. We're bringing you the real deal."

"And here it is. You know all those laws and commandments in the OT about circumcision, holidays, and all the ritual. Well, you have to keep them if you really want to belong to God. They're in the Bible, right?"

They said, “Being forgiven and having peace with God isn’t just about trusting Christ. It’s about obeying all kinds of laws.”

And you know what happened? The Galatian Christians said, “Hey, sounds right to us.” And they bought into what these men told them.

Now, when Paul got wind of this it cut him like a knife. Not because he was proud, or because he wanted people to follow him. The guy wasn’t trying to form some kind of cult group that he could head up.

What got to him was that someone was distorting God’s message and confusing the Galatians.

The Bible says our relationship with God comes by faith. We’re forgiven through faith and then we live by faith. Not by rules and regulations.

We do the right thing *because* we were forgiven by God. We don’t do the right thing *to become* forgiven by God.

So when Paul hears of this defection he gets angry. And he does something that was highly unusual for him. Paul apparently had an eye problem. Later on, in chapter 4 he’s going to mention it.

Normally he dictated his letters. But this time, he sits down and writes the whole thing himself. In chapter 6 he writes: *See with what large letters I have written to you with my own hand!*

In other words, “You can tell from my penmanship that this came from me.”

Now since Galatians is what we call an epistle, or a letter, we’d expect some kind of greeting to start it off. That exactly what we get.

Every culture has it’s own form for writing letters. We usually start with the word “Dear” even if some other adjective would be more appropriate. It’s just a formality.

In the first century there was a form for starting letters too. You started with your own name and then gave a greeting.

I want us to remember that, because we could just think of Galatians as some heavy theological paper. Like it was some position paper presented in some musty seminary classroom somewhere.

Remember, this is a personal letter coming from Paul's heart being written to congregations of common, ordinary people.

Common ordinary people like you and me. God means for His truth to be practical. He means for it to be understood by everybody.

But then at the same time the Bible claims to be God's word. God's message written through men. That makes it alive, and powerful, and authoritative for our lives.

So you got these two things going on. Galatians is personal and practical. And it's also God inspired and authoritative.

That's why Paul throws in the part about being an *apostle*, (*not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead*).

If you read Paul's other letters you'll see that he really likes to call himself a slave of Jesus. He's not about titles and position.

But, people have attacked his credibility so they can capture these Galatians into being their followers. So now Paul has to pull rank.

The apostles were a select group of men chosen by Jesus Christ Himself and given extreme authority. It was time to use that authority.

What were going to read in the coming weeks is hard hitting. Some of it's controversial. All of it's very powerful. And not all of it's positive.

You know, I personally wouldn't want to go to a church where they're always hammering on the negatives. That gets old.

But I also wouldn't want to go to a church where nobody ever warned me about the stuff that's wrong.

Apparently some of the countries in Southern Asia were warned after the earthquake that they might be hit with tidal waves, but they didn't want to lose tourist dollars so they didn't warn people.

Look at the consequences. Sometimes we need to hear about the danger so we can deal with it.

Sometimes the NT talks negatively as a warning against spiritual dangers.

Sometimes negatives are important. So right in the first verse Paul starts off by saying, "not from men."

He's saying, "Guys, we're not going to worry about human approval here."

I don't want to imply that we shouldn't study church history and tap into the rich heritage of those who have gone on before us. Christianity is a historical religion and we need to have a sense of the flow of history to understand it.

But, ultimately what we believe has to be based on a clear reading of the Bible, not the interpretation of a denomination.

The Catholic Catechism says, "As the Divinely appointed teacher of revealed truth, the Church is infallible...in matters both of faith and morals."

"It is needless to point out that if the Christian Faith is indeed a revealed doctrine, which men must believe under pain of eternal loss, the gift of infallibility was necessary to the Church. Could she err at all, she might err in any point."

Think about that. The claim is that the church becomes the sole standard of truth.

Jehovah's Witnesses claim the Watchtower Society which publishes all their literature is God's infallible prophet.

The Mormon church teaches their children a chorus, "Follow The Prophet, Follow The Prophet, Follow The Prophet, Don't Go Astray," Meaning the current president of the church. Again the claim is infallibility.

That's one of the reasons why this is a non-denominational church. We don't want a central authority determining what we believe. What we believe is the result of our diligent study of the Bible. We don't claim infallibility. That's why we challenge you to read the Bible for your self and measure what we teach.

Well, Paul is saying, "I glory in the fact that mere men didn't authorize me. In fact no man had anything to do with confirming me. I got my authorization straight from the top. This is all about God choosing me directly."

This authority issue was absolutely important because this letter is going to be straightforward and deal with the difference between false teaching and God's truth.

So first Paul greets the churches, then he gets the focus on the most important person in this whole discussion.

II. The Focus Of The Bible Is Jesus Christ

Read 3-5

In a real sense these verses sum up everything that this book's about.

How are we forgiven of our sin?
How do we find peace with God?
Where do we find freedom and hope?

Is it by what we do? Is it by following some set of laws? Is it through a series of religious obligations and rituals?

Not according to the Bible. According to the Bible, grace, peace, and purpose are all based on Jesus.

The enemy that Paul was fighting in this letter is alive and well in our day too.

The names and faces change. Some of the fine points in teaching might be a little different. But the lie is still with us.

Peace, joy, and purpose only come when we're in a right relationship with our Creator. And the Bible says that being right with our Creator is all based on Jesus

Christ.

He gave Himself for our sins. He was our substitute who died on the cross to bear the full fury of God for our sins.

The lie is that we can be right with our Creator by some other means. The lie is that Jesus' death isn't sufficient.

Now, you might say, "I don't see what this has to do with me. No one's coming to me and telling me I have to keep Jewish feast days and ceremonies."

It's really important for us to understand something here. The essential problem wasn't that the false teachers from Judea were telling the Galatians to trust in the works of the Jewish law to make them right with God.

It was that they were telling them to trust in their works at all.

They preached a religion of works rather than a relationship of faith.

The error of these men we call "Judiaizers" is a modern error as well as an ancient one. They would have agreed that everybody needs to have faith in Jesus Christ. The problem was, they said that faith wasn't enough.

They said it's faith plus the Mosaic Law. Today people say it's faith plus baptism. It's faith plus joining our group. It's faith plus surrendering your life to Christ. It's faith plus turning from, your sin. It's faith plus living a godly life.

Here's where the Galatians got confused. Here's where we can get confused. God says the way we come into a right relationship with Him is by faith. The lie says it's faith plus. And the "plus" is usually something good.

The Law of Moses is holy, just and good. Baptism is good. Joining a church is good. Turning from sin and living a godly life is good.

But making the good things part of the salvation message is bad. It's bad because people end up trusting themselves and the good that they've done instead of trusting Christ.

You say, "Ed, you nit-picking. What's the big deal? You're making something out of nothing."

Let's see if Paul thought it was nit picking.

Read 6

The word translated "marvel" means to be "absolutely astounded" or "bewildered." We'd say, "I can't believe it!"

I can't believe how you people have turned away from God.

That's powerful. This isn't just semantics. If we say Jesus Christ isn't enough to reconcile us to our Creator we have turned away from God Himself.

And we've turned to a different Gospel. **Read vs 7**

He uses the Greek word *heteros* in verse 6, and the word *allos* in verse 7.

Heteros means "another of a different kind." *Allos* means "another of the same kind."

So he says, "What you believe now is a completely different Gospel. It's not another of the same kind, because there's only one.

When you mix Jesus with any human effort you've created a new entity.

'But, " He says, "There are some who trouble you..."

There are some who are coming into your congregation and disturbing you. They're saying, "Hey, what about the sabbath day and circumcision, and all the Law. It's God's law, so you don't have enough if all you have is Jesus!"

People have said to me, "If you tell people that they're saved by Christ alone and not by turning from their sins that's 'easy believism.'" Have you ever heard that term.

People have told me, "If you tell people that they're saved by faith alone they won't have any motivation to lead godly lives."

I've had them say, "How come your church is so picky about the way the Gospel is presented? Why do you guys get so caught up in the terminology?"

Well hang on to your hats folks. Just sit back and try to process what's said next.

III. There Is A Curse On All Who Would Change God's Message Of Grace

Read 8-9

Those are pretty harsh words from the same man who wrote I Corinthians 13. I Corinthians 13 is the great love chapter.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a ...clanging cymbal. ... if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor..., but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. Love never fails.

In one passage he's talking about love and in the other he's hurling anathemas around.

The word "accursed" in verse 8 is the Greek word *anathema*. *Anathema* comes from *ava* which means "up," and *tithemi*, which means "to place." It means "to hand up to God for Him to judge."

The point is this: This isn't about people liking one teacher better than another. It isn't about personalities and likes and dislikes. It's about truth. God's revealed truth.

And God's revealed truth about the way we become part of God's eternal family is so important Paul says there's a curse on anyone who changes it.

If an angel shows up on your doorstep telling you the way to heaven is Jesus plus your good works shut the door. Don't listen. Because that message is a perversion of the gospel of Christ.

The Bible pronounces any message that mixes faith and good works for salvation heresy. And so should we.

That's why our church doctrinal statement is so specific. Here's what we say:

"Salvation is the gift of God brought to man by grace and received by personal faith and

trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Man is saved by undeserved mercy through faith and nothing of man enters into his salvation; it is a free gift.

Man's efforts, before or after salvation, regardless of how good or well intended, do nothing to secure or guarantee salvation. Nothing can be added to the finished work of Christ.

Repentance is necessary for salvation, but the word does not mean "to turn from sin." No human works are involved in the salvation process, and God does not accept us because we make ourselves worthy of Him.

Repentance for salvation means a change of mind from men's ideas of salvation and religion to acceptance of God's way of salvation.

"Shallow Christianity" cannot be cured by adding works to the gospel but by a correct understanding of salvation and grace."

Paul wrote to the Galatians with his own hand because he knew this was a life or death issue. A heaven or hell issue.

We need to see it that way too.

The main emphasis of this letter to the Galatians is the sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus "gave Himself for our sins," He took all of our guilt, all of our shame, all of our iniquities and paid the complete and total price that God's Law demanded.

Biblical salvation is *"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved."*

Satan's counterfeit is, "Straighten up your life, follow Jesus, and then add the cross."

The counterfeit can sound so convincing. The Galatians bought into it hook, line, and sinker.

In fact, they bought into it so fast that Paul said, "I marvel."

The offence of the cross is this: we can't do anything to earn God's favor. When you come by way of the cross it's a totally humbling experience.

And you know what? That bugs a lot of people to no end. They want to do something.

God says back to us, "You want to do something? Then after you come to me by faith, serve me with a heart of love. Serve me in the power of the Holy Spirit. *You've been bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

Serve me as my child. But don't try to win your way into my family by anything you could ever do.

Where do you stand in relation to God's grace? Religions have no end to the number of ways they say we can have God's eternal forgiveness.

God says there's just one.

Where does real freedom, contentment, peace, and joy come from? They come as a result of God's grace.

Jesus Christ suffered and died so that we could live forever.

The people of Thailand had 2 1/2 hours between the time of the earthquake and the time the tsunamies hit their shores. There was time, but the warnings never came.

You've heard God's warnings this morning. I don't know how much time you'll have to respond. The NT says: *Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*