

This is the **first lesson** in our study through *Paul's Letter to the Galatians*.

It's **one of the shorter books** of the New Testament, just **6 short chapters**.

It's about the **size of a single feature article** you would read in a magazine.

Since it was **written as a letter**, it was meant **to be read on one sitting**.

We plan to study each part carefully so it will take **17 lessons** to go through it all.

I recommend that you read the whole book through a few times so you get the natural flow of thought in it.

We can't be sure about the exact individual churches that received this letter.

Galatia is a region located in what today is **Turkey**.

There are **some clues** that help us figure out when it was written by the Apostle Paul.

In **Galatians 4:13** he mentions that **he had preached the Gospel there** before.

This might **fit in with his visit to the churches in South Galatia** in **Acts 13, 14 and 15**.

In **Galatians 2:1** he mentions **his trip to Jerusalem for the great council** mentioned in Acts 15.

So this letter had to have been written **after that council**.

In **Galatians 1:6** Paul says he's amazed that they had **wandered off so quickly** to a different gospel.

It must have been **shortly after his visit with them**.

In **Galatians 1:1-2** he **doesn't mention Timothy and Silas** as being there with him.

Later they were with him when he wrote 1st & 2nd Thessalonians. In those letters he mentions them.

They arrived in Corinth to be with Paul **later** on his second missionary journey.

This could mean that Galatians was **written at Corinth before their arrival**.

This would make this perhaps **the oldest of his New Testament letters**. (50-53 AD)

Some believe he wrote this letter to the people in **Northern Galatia** which would **date it a little later**.

The exact date **isn't important** in **interpreting** the message of this letter.

But this was **the region of the world that received this letter**.

Paul's letter to the Galatians and the entire New Testament were written in a form of **Greek** called "**Koine**".

It means the "**Common Greek**". It's also sometimes called "**Hellenistic Greek**".

After the conquests of Alexander the Great over 300 years before Christ,

Koine became the **primary language** of the **extended Mediterranean countries**.

In God's providence most of the civilized world was prepared with a **universally understood language**.

The New Testament books and letters were able to be **read and taught throughout the entire Roman Empire**.

During the first Century, there were problems in the churches of Galatia.

When the *Gospel of Christ* came to the people there, **Christian churches** were formed.

Some new believers were being misled by confused teachings about the Bible and the Gospel message.

Paul was deeply concerned about this **confusion**.

We'll get to all the **details** of it as we work our way through this epistle in the **up-coming studies**.

Paul begins this letter in the typical way, by identifying himself as the writer the letter.

1. **Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--**
2. **and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:**

Paul makes sure they understand that **he's writing** to them as an **Apostle**.

He **wasn't writing** as just a **Rabbi, teacher, or friend**.

Apostleship was an **awesome responsibility**.

Attached to that office was the **authority** Christ had directly given to these men
to **guide the establishing** of this **new form** of **God's church**.

Paul had been **personally commissioned and sent forth** by **Jesus Christ**.

Of course he **didn't become a believer until after** the **death and resurrection** of our Savior.

Before that he fiercely persecuted the church.

He was a **well trained and powerful Rabbi** having studied under the great scholar **Gamaliel**.

In one of those rare but special appearances of **Jesus** after the crucifixion,

Paul was **called** to be part of the group the Bible calls **Apostles**, **spokesmen** for God's Kingdom. Therefore, he spoke with the **full authority** of the Lord, being guided by the **Holy Spirit**. By virtue of **inspiration** the **words he wrote** in this letter are the **words of God**.

His calling was **not a commission by men**. It came **from God himself** supernaturally.

His **critics failed to recognize** the **authority** behind his message.

They weren't really attacking just him. **They were attacking Jesus and God the Father** who sent him.

Paul wasn't alone as he wrote to the Galatians.

There were **other believers** with him, members by grace of the **Family of God**, **brothers** in Christ.

Paul then gets right down to the **center of the Christian faith**.

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

4. who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,

5. to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul generally started his letters by wishing **Grace** and **Peace** to his readers.

Grace and Peace take on a **very different dimension** for the **Christian**.

In Paul's time, this common form of **Greek** called **Koine** was spoken in the entire Roman Empire.

Greeks **greeted** each other with the word "Kai-reh" (**χαίρε**).

It was used the **same way** we use the words, "**hello**", or "**greetings**".

But here, **Paul modified the form** of the word slightly to "Ka-ris" (**χάρις**) - which means "**grace or favor**".

It went way **beyond the popular greeting**.

Paul was **wishing them God's favor** which is **bestowed sovereignly** upon otherwise **undeserving** people.

By this mercy God **changes the lost into his Children** through the **sacrifice of Christ**,

and by his **Covenant Promises** he **cares** for them **forever** as their **Good Shepherd**.

It's a very **fitting greeting** for the start of a letter written to those whose **lives ought to be centered on God's grace**.

Then he wished them **peace**.

The **old Hebrew greeting** among **Jews** was and still is, שלום - their word for "**peace**".

It was a wish **that God's covenantal peace would be upon them**.

But to many, it **had deteriorated** into a **wish for the overthrow of Rome** by a military Messiah.

To them, **peace** was **freedom from Rome**, **not** just the covenant blessing of God.

It was an **arrogance** that meant **peace from those they saw as unworthy** in the world.

But they'd forgotten that **we're all unworthy** aside from God's grace.

The **Greek speaking Jews** used the **Greek** word Paul uses here, ειρηνη - the ordinary Greek word for "**peace**".

It's a very general word for **freedom from all sorts of discomforts and problems**.

But Paul **didn't mean** it as **just freedom** from **outward troubles**.

He meant the **inner calm** that comes to those who **rest in God's promises and power**.

In **Philippians 4:7**, Paul wrote about **that peace we have in Christ** saying, "**And the peace of God,**

which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

This goes **way beyond the imagined peace** talked about by those who don't trust in Jesus Christ.

And it's a **humbling peace**. Not one earned or deserved.

It's the blessing of **inner tranquility given by grace** to those who have **offended the Creator**.

The One against whom we commit all our **moral crimes**.

God alone gives us the **calm of heart** earned by **Jesus Christ** in our place.

This **amazing grace** is what **drives our love** for him and **enables us to live** as we ought to live.

These covenant blessings come **from one source** only.

They come "**from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,**"

The **centrality of Christ** as the **source of our blessings** is a **major point** in all Paul's letters.

Jesus promised this blessing too. He said in **John 14:27**, "**Peace** I leave with you; **my peace** I give to you.

Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid."

But the **gospel message** isn't just good wishes, its based on a **firm foundation**.

Verse 4 says, "**who gave himself** for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age,

according to the will of our God and Father,"

That *foundation* is the **redeeming work** of our **Lord Jesus Christ**,

The **primary fact here** is that **Jesus gave himself for our sins**.

This is the *center* of the **good news** -- what we call the *gospel*.

The **sin and guilt that separates us** from God, was **paid for in full** by the Savior.

The purpose of Christ's coming and death was to **deliver his people from this present evil age**.

This is the **practical side** of the work of Christ.

It's **not just a theological fact**, or an *emotional stimulus* to excite us in Godly living.

We live in that **time between Eden and the Final coming** of Jesus Christ.

It's a time of **wars, natural disasters, crime, deceptions, confusion, and hatred**.

We should see **these challenges as opportunities**.

Christ **delivers us** from **bondage to sin**, and **repairs our fellowship with God**.

We walk bravely through these dark valleys as we're led by the hand of our **Savior**, our **Good Shepherd**.

And Paul **assures us** that it's **all done according to God's will**, the will of our Heavenly Father.

This has always been the **eternal plan**.

Though it was **revealed in stages**, it **never changed** or had to be modified.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesian churches later in his life he said in **Ephesians 1:3-6**,

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
4. even as **he chose us in him** before the foundation of the world,
that we should **be holy and blameless** before him. In love
5. **he predestined us for adoption** as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will,
6. to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Fallen man likes to think he controls his own future, but that's **not** what the **Bible teaches**.

It tells us very clearly that **all who come to believe** are **made able** to do so **by God's grace alone**.

He **chose them** from among the whole fallen human race **for a purpose**:

their **lives are to be lived differently**, as those **redeemed** by the Savior.

Therefore, **all the glory** for our faith, confidence, and changed lives should be given **to God**.

He alone is the **author of our salvation**, and **procuror of our peace**.

Then Paul adds in verse 5, "to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

All the glory and honor centers on God.

Paul closes this introduction to his letter with the familiar word, *Amen*.

It's an **old Hebrew word** that simply means, "*truth*".

What he says is **absolutely what God himself says** and is **absolutely reliable**.

The beginning of this letter reminds us of the foundation and promise we have as Christians.

The **original recipients** of this epistle are all **long dead** and **living with our Savior** in heaven.

But we have **problems today** that are **very similar** to what they faced nearly 2,000 years ago.

This letter is preserved in Scripture because **the message is for us too**.

We still live in the *present evil age* before the final end when Christ comes back in glory.

We face the **God-dishonoring ways** of a civilization under the control of sin and Satan.

Living here isn't easy, but we have the **same Risen Savior** and **Gospel Promise**

that **encouraged the First Century Christians**.

While **politicians manipulate** people's minds to get elected,

and **popular religious leaders**, pastors and authors, **confuse the content of the Bible**,

while our **children are tempted** to live immorally, and **adults feed their own fallen lusts**,

while **enemies make war** and **criminals take** what isn't theirs,

and while **disease, disasters and death** threaten us every day ...

yet we have that same covenant promise of grace and peace to see us through.

It's still **based on the victory of Jesus Christ** on the cross of Calvary.

And it's still **God's will to deliver us** from it all, because **he loves us** as his own child.

As we study this book of Galatians, we find our way back to the basics of our faith.

We're reminded that we don't have to earn God's blessings. They've **already been earned** by Jesus Christ.

Our duty is to *rely* on that **all-sufficient work of mercy**, and to **live thankfully** for it.

We don't have to be confused by the way Christianity is constantly represented as something that it's not.

We have **God's unchanging word** that gives us **answers** for **all the challenges** we face.

There's always the lure of what's *popular*, what *seems successful*, and the *majority view* that **tempts people** to say that if it's so popular and well liked -- **it must be right**.

Jesus and the Apostles dared to challenge that kind of thinking, worshiping, and living.

They **re-taught** the **original meaning** of the **law of Moses**, and the **principles and proverbs** written by God's prophets for his people.

Though the **historic situations are different** in every era,

the truths and principles of morality have never changed -- they **don't need updating**.

Just as **Paul started out this Epistle**, and the others he wrote to the early churches,

our own **conversations and friendships** should **begin** with this *same foundation*:

God gives us his **blessings of grace and peace in our hearts** through the finished work of our **Risen Savior, Jesus Christ**.

Inner peace and security can't be found in a winning lottery ticket, in a promotion at work, in a better car or house, or in better furniture, clothes, video games, trophies, or collectibles.

It's found in being **faithful** to the one who is the **author of real spiritual life**.

It's found in the **Living Savior** Jesus Christ who is **still with us** and **loves us**, just as **he did all his people** from the beginning.

If we want a more satisfying and victorious life --

Nothing else satisfies like the **life secured** for us by **God's grace**, through the **death of our Savior**, and **revealed in his Word** as the **Holy Spirit applies** it to our hearts.

So we can learn to say with the Apostle Paul, "**according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.**"

The Bible quotations in this article are from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

- 1 Παῦλος ἀπόστολος οὐκ ἀπ' ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ δι' ἀνθρώπου ἀλλὰ διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
καὶ θεοῦ πατρὸς τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν,
- 2 καὶ οἱ σὺν ἐμοὶ πάντες ἀδελφοὶ ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῆς Γαλατίας,
- 3 χάρις ὑμῖν καὶ εἰρήνη ἀπὸ θεοῦ πατρὸς ἡμῶν καὶ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ
- 4 τοῦ δόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν, ὅπως ἐξέλθῃται ἡμᾶς
ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστῶτος πονηροῦ κατὰ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν,
- 5 ᾧ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, ἀμήν.