

Let Freedom Ring: Thoughts On Galatians – Part 2

By: Keith Keyser

“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.” Galatians 1:3-5.

After establishing the divine origin of his apostleship, Paul greets the Galatian churches with this beautiful doxology, which sums up the gospel that he defends in this epistle. First, it is one characterized by “grace and peace.” While it is true that these terms were used as salutations in the ancient Jewish world, he is employing them for their theological content, not merely out of literary courtesy. “Grace” is frequently defined as “God’s unmerited favor.” It emphasizes the free gift of God, irrespective of any human merit or contribution. It focuses on the giver, not on the recipient of the gift.

Peace In Our Time

“Peace” is often discussed in this world, but seldom experienced in any form. It is the fleeting object of man’s deepest yearnings, yet it slips through his fingers like grains of sand. This is because the most important aspect of peace is a right relationship with one’s Creator; if one does not have peace with God, then peace of mind, peace among men, and all of other types of peace will prove to be maddeningly elusive. Through the work of the Prince of Peace, however, one may be given a righteous standing and thereby be reconciled to God. As Romans 5:1 succinctly puts it: “Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

As beautiful as grace and peace are in themselves, they are impossible to experience apart from the work of God the Father and God the Son (verse 3.) Together these words describe the glory of God’s personal character and the beneficence of His gifts towards men. One writer describes them thus: “The first is the source of salvation and the second is the result. Grace is positional, peace is practical, and together they flow from God our Father through His Son and our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹ Furthermore, the deity and divine equality of the Lord Jesus is demonstrated by this joint mention of the activity of the Father and the Son.

His grace brings rebels nigh, changes them into new creatures, and extends peace that passes understanding to them (2 Cor. 5:17; Phil. 4:7.) His peace to them is never rescinded, and springs from the knowledge that they are right with God, who “...works all things according to the counsel of His own will” (Eph. 1:11.) He seats them in the heavenlies, giving them free acceptance in God’s presence and provides them with unassailable heavenly inheritance (Eph. 1:11; 2:1-10; 1 Pet. 1:4.) In short, God gives His redeemed ones unparalleled blessings of grace and peace.

The Gift Of Gifts

The Creator's grace is chiefly seen in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus, who though sinless, paid the penalty that sinners deserved. Elucidating the specific way that this grace was extended to undeserving mankind Paul writes "...[He] gave Himself," thus demonstrating the voluntary nature of Christ's sacrificial death (verse 4.) The Son of God went to the horror of the cross with perfect foreknowledge of all that awaited Him there. Gruesome as they were, the torture and indignities that He suffered at the hands of His creatures paled in comparison with the agony of an utterly holy Being becoming a sin offering on behalf of humankind. His death was "for our sins" – the things that alienated man from his holy Maker and forged the chains of vice that enslaved humans of every type and description. He saved believers from the wrath to come by suffering that righteous anger in their place. In spite of this, He did not shrink from His responsibility, but went forth to the death of the cross in complete obedience to His Father's will.

The verse next details the object of His self-sacrifice: "...that He might deliver us from this present evil age." "Deliver" strikes the note of salvation from extreme danger. As a well-known commentator writes:

Christianity is, in fact, a rescue religion. The Greek verb in this verse is a strong one (*exaireō*, in the middle voice). It is used in the Acts of the rescue of the Israelites from their Egyptian slavery (7:34), of the rescue of Peter both from prison and from the hand of Herod the King (12:11), and of the rescue of Paul from an infuriated mob about to lynch him (23:27). This verse in Galatians is the only place where it is used metaphorically of salvation. Christ died to rescue us.ⁱⁱ

Another remarks: "The verb ἐξέληται, as in Luke's reporting of its use in the early church ([Acts 7:10](#), [34](#); [12:11](#); [23:27](#); [26:17](#), where the emphasis is on the idea of rescue), denotes not removal but rescue from the power of. So the deliverance spoken of here is not a removal from the world but a rescue from the evil that dominates it."ⁱⁱⁱ The Lord delivers His people from this evil age, so that they live the life that characterizes the age to come. Eternal life is more than life of unending duration; it is a quality of life – that which pertains to a relationship with the King of kings and sharing in His kingdom. The world as it currently is, dominated by lust and wickedness is passing away. The triumphant death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus make it inevitable that this age will be superseded by the age to come, where "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:22-28.)

Where There Is A Will, There Is A Way

The dramatic deliverance carried out by the work of Christ is totally in keeping with the Father's desires. The Son gave Himself to rescue the lost, but as Paul notes, it was "...according to the will of our God and Father" (v. 4.) In the divine counsels of eternity past, the triune God determined to ransom and save His people from sin, death, and hell (1 Pet. 1:20.) Like Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, "...the two of them went together" to Golgotha (Gen. 22:6; along with the Holy Spirit, Heb. 9:14.) Designating Him as "our God and Father" reminds one of the

gracious relationship that the Almighty now gives to believers: they are His children and may call Him “Abba, Father” (Jn. 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15.)

Praise The Savior Ye Who Know Him

With the ancient apostle Christians say: “To whom be glory forever and ever” (v. 5.) Such great salvation naturally elicits worship, praise, and thanksgiving from the saints’ hearts and lips. This doxology is astounding coming from a converted Jew. As one commentator recounts:

To any Jew, it was natural to slip into reverential *bĕrākâ*, or ‘blessing’, after any mention of the divine name. For instance, ‘The Holy One—blessed be he’ is one of the commonest of such blessings used by later Jewish commentators. So here, after the mention of the name of God, it is natural to add *to whom be the glory forever and ever* (literally, ‘for ages of ages’, where the same word *aiōn* is used). Just as in old days the name of Yahweh, with its association of salvation from Egyptian bondage, stirred a Jew to praise, so now the name of Jesus Christ stirs Paul to similar response. If the Jew of old was a ‘Yahwist’, to use modern theological jargon, then Paul and those to whom he wrote were ‘Christians’, whose whole understanding of God was dominated by the revelation in Christ.^{iv}

The great God and Savior will ever be lauded for the greatness of His person and work. Those who are redeemed through faith in the Lord Jesus will always remember what He has done and be enraptured with His lovely person.

ⁱ John MacArthur, *Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), p. 5; electronic edition (Logos.)

ⁱⁱ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians : Only One Way*, Downer's Grove, Ill., U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1986, p. 18; electronic edition (Logos.)

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary : Galatians*. Vol. 41. Dallas: Word, Inc., 2002, p. 8; electronic ed. (Logos.) I generally agree with his assessment that the emphasis is on “rescue from the power of” something, but would note that verses like Acts 7:34 and 12:11 include deliverance from physical places (i.e. Egypt & Herod’s jail respectively.) Of course, Christ’s rescue of believers includes the eventual deliverance from the world as it now is (fallen & sinful) through His coming. –KRK.

^{iv} R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Vol. 9, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989. p. 73; electronic ed. (Logos.)