

“To Deliver Us From The Present Evil Age”

(Galatians 1:1-12)

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I am excited that I get to delve into a series on the letter to the Galatians with you, my dear congregation in the Lord, and for many reasons.

One reason is because more important than the fact that this letter is one of *my* favorite letters in Scripture, it was *Luther's* favorite period. Luther actually called the letter to the Galatians after his beloved wife! He called Paul's letter “my Katie von Bora” (Kittelsohn 249) and he said this about the letter overall:

“But in this epistle Paul is dealing with the most important and sublime subject matter: the Gospel, faith, Christian righteousness, the definition of the Person of Christ, the meaning of His work, what He undertook and accomplished on our behalf, and what blessings He brought to us miserable sinners (AE 26:367).”

But another reason that I'm excited to get into this letter is because it came through the revelation given to Saint Paul, the apostle we identify with in the name of our congregation. Over the years I've heard people talk about the significance of how congregations are named. For example, if a congregation names itself in connection to an apostle, say Paul, then should that congregation's name be “Saint Paul's” (with an apostrophe-“s”) or simply “Saint Paul” (with no “s” at all)? It has been said that to name a congregation as we have gives the impression that the congregation is identified as being in a state of the possessive sense in connection to Saint Paul. That is, we are a congregation that *belongs to* Saint Paul. This is silly and all of this provides for me the launching pad for expounding on why I'm excited about our name and about the letter to the Galatians.

We are “Saint Paul's” in the sense that we hold to the powerful and overwhelmingly comforting revelation and exposition of the saving Gospel of Jesus Christ that God provided *through* the apostle Saint Paul. *We are Saint Paul's in the sense that Saint Paul's proclamation of the Gospel is what we identify with! That revelation of Jesus that was Paul's is ours and we are named Saint Paul's in order to perpetuate this life-saving revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ!*

And if there is any letter of the 13 Pauline epistles which communicates this wonderful saving Gospel, then the letter to the Galatians is it! I look forward to this series and I hope you will as well.

One of the other reasons that I'm excited about preaching on this letter is because it was written in such a bold, direct, and no non-sense manner. It is the kind of message that we need today in the 21st century!

Writing this letter was in a sense for Saint Paul a very difficult task. He was indignant and even angry while full of the Holy Spirit and led by God. The congregations in the region of Galatia which he had worked so hard by God's grace to establish had been compromised by false teachers and by a false, so-called "gospel."

This letter demonstrates therefore what some might call "tough love," and what a holy jealousy that strives to protect the beloved sounds like and feels like. Paul writes so as to defend his God-given call and apostolic ministry to refute those who attack him and the work he laid down in Galatia. As a result of the fact that Saint Paul was attacked, the Gospel of Jesus which Paul taught and proclaimed was also being attacked, and therefore the saving Gospel itself in the midst of the people of Galatia was being compromised. The very eternal-life source for the churches in Galatia was being undermined and Saint Paul therefore was red-hot. Yes, we should be a congregation that will proclaim the Gospel with such boldness, because we live in a world today that will otherwise dismiss the true Gospel as irrelevant and in turn dismiss the single most important message in the world and the only source of lasting life. May we never be silent and may we always be bold just like the apostle Saint Paul was when it came to the Gospel proclaimed through him!

After Saint Paul writes of his qualifications in verses 1-2, he gives the congregations in Galatia this greeting recorded in verses 3-5:

"³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."

How many times have you heard me extend to you the words "grace" and "peace"? These are vital and there is no more important gift that could be bestowed. The order is also vital. Grace is God's unconditioned good will towards mankind which is decisively expressed in the saving work of Jesus Christ. Peace is a state of life – peace with God and peace with one another – enjoyed by those who have effectively experienced the divine grace (Buls quoting

Bruce in *Notes on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 2). But grace must come first. Christ must be given to you and He was! He came for you and gave His life for you...you've received from Jesus the gift of what His life, death, and resurrection has won for you, namely the forgiveness of sins and eternal life...grace is not some ethereal, weird concept, but is rock-solid and is bound-up in Jesus. That's why you can say, "God has been, is, and will forever be gracious towards me!" How do you know? Because He gave you – yes you – His only Son Jesus. God's unconditional good will is yours through what Jesus has done, is doing (even praying for you and putting His Word in you as I preach), and will do (keeping you in the palms of His saving, once-pierced-for-your sins...hands).

And on account of being given Jesus, you have peace. God is now on your side and as a result, all who share this saving faith know God's peace in their relationships towards one another. That is why we live in love and forgiveness towards each other in the family of God. We have grace and so now we also have peace through Jesus!

It is the next part, however, that we especially struggle with nowadays. Why did Jesus do all of this for us? What was the urgency? What was the need? This is the only place where Paul uses this alarming word "rescue!" in all of his epistles. Jesus had to "rescue!" you. Picture yourself being in a burning building, in the most dire of circumstances, and then you are rescued! It is a powerful word at verse 4 which our ESV translates as "deliver"...in my opinion, an unfortunate reduction of the original language.

Why did you and do you (continually) need to be rescued as if you were in a burning building? The reason is given: just as the Galatians were living in, we live today in "**the present evil age (verse 4).**"

Saint Paul is not talking about the material world, not this gorgeous planet and physical creation which is still good even though sin has entered our lives. What Paul is talking about is what he calls in the original language ***poneros***. It means active evil. Our age, our time is marked by active evil.

Let's be clear about this concept. Sin is a spiritual disease which entered our lives when the fall of man, the rebellion against God first occurred in the Garden of Eden. Sin's results; the material conditions which follow sin, which result from sin, which demonstrate and act out the effects of sin is evil. *Evil is the expression of sin's disorder in the universe.*

Let's elaborate on this situation from God's Word:

Ephesians 2:1-3: ***“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience – among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”***

What is evil? It is when people openly follow Satan (or follow the ways of Satan even if they claim not to believe in Satan) and actively express in material, physical ways open rebellion against God; it is crooked disobedience against God; and as Luther said, when the world is at its best, it is at its worst when it comes to demonstrating evil (AE 26, 40).

We live in a country in accord with the freedom God permits in His left-hand kingdom that is a republic that has evolved from a country that once considered itself a Christian nation (see for example the 1882 Supreme Court decision *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States in which the court said: “Our laws and institutions are based upon and embody the teachings of the Redeemer of mankind...[I]n this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian...[T]his is a Christian nation [Smith, Faith and the Presidency, 13]*), to a country that now celebrates the expression of evil in an open way through media, professional sports, and the immorality that is defended and permitted in this land.

We live in a country where it is PC to applaud the openly gay professional athlete, where it is considered a birthright to kill the unborn (the epitome of insanity), and in a world where it is considered nothing to assume that your children will go along with the world’s standards concerning how they treat their bodies in a culture where “dating” conforms to automatic immorality.

But it is easy to list the evils we see. What Saint Paul was concerned about ***was whether as God’s people we see it?*** Do we see it? Or do we go along with it as if it were “just the way it is,” or in accord with that sterilized descriptor: “the norm.” Don’t look now but you are in a burning building and its all around you in this age...and the Gospel is no Gospel if Jesus did not come to rescue you from it. Our sin, however, is seen when we are not alarmed, when we behave as the frog in the kettle that adjusts and adjusts to the heat until we are dead. Our sin is that we are inherent compromisers of the Gospel. We are not properly alarmed by the present age and it is cooking us up, tempting us every day to go along with it, until we are destroyed. Our sin is complacency; our sin is that we dance with evil. This makes us worthy of eternal death.

But thanks be to God dear Christians that this present evil age did not dissuade our Savior from coming to your rescue. In fact, it propelled Him. And while Satan tries to lull you to sleep in the face of this present evil age, the Holy Spirit awakens you and calls you to see with new eyes the truth about life, the truth about evil, and the truth about Christ's salvation to rescue you from it! You now see the evil one Christian, so that you can say to him as Luther said:

“In fact, when you say that I am a sinner, you provide me with armor and weapons against yourself, so that I may slit your throat with your own sword and trample you underfoot. You yourself are preaching the glory of God to me; for you are reminding me, a miserable and condemned sinner, of the fatherly love of God, who ‘so loved the world that He gave His only Son, etc.’ (John 3:16). You are reminding me of the blessing of Christ my Redeemer. On His shoulders, not on mine, lie all my sins. For ‘the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all,’ and ‘for the transgressions of His people He was stricken’ (Is. 53:6, 8). Therefore when you say that I am a sinner, you do not frighten me; but you bring me immense consolation (AE 26, 37).”

So with this grace and peace dear Christian and by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you through your holy baptism, flee the burning building – see that it is Christ who rescues you – see that He is doing it now, right here as you come forward to receive in the Blessed Sacrament His true body and true blood to be rescued from this present evil age. Here He rescues you again. Here His grace and peace is poured out so that you are kept safe from and taken out of the ways of this present evil age.