



02. Galatians 1:1-5

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## Galatians 1:1-5

<sup>1</sup>Paul an **apostle** – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but by Jesus **Christ** and God the Father who raised him from the dead

<sup>2</sup>and all the **members** of God's family who are with me. To the **churches** of Galatia:

<sup>3</sup>**Grace** to you and **peace** from God our Father and the **Lord** Jesus, the Messiah

<sup>4</sup>who gave himself for our sins to  
**set us free** from the present  
evil age, according to the will of our God and Father

<sup>5</sup>to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.'

## Address (Galatians 1:1-5)

### Galatians 1:1a

Paul an **apostle** – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but by Jesus **the Messiah** and God the Father

- Luke also speaks of Paul as an ‘apostle’ (Acts 14:4,6).
  - Obviously, Paul was commissioned by the church community in Antioch, but this was under the inspiration of the Spirit of Jesus.
- ’In the church at **Antioch** there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and **Saul**. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off’ (Acts 13:1-3).

Paul an **apostle** – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father

Paul was sent on mission by the Spirit of loving communion enjoyed by the exalted Jesus and God his Father, the Spirit that the glorified Jesus was pouring out over the world.

Paul is not denying the role of human discernment, mediation and decision as noted in the text from Acts. He is stressing the fact that the origin of his mission is not to be sought at this level. He is an apostle because he is sent by Jesus, the Messiah, who is anointed by God the Father with the fullness of God's Spirit.

\* Trinity in the New Testament

Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father



Jesus Christ

## Galatians 1:1

<sup>1</sup>Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father who raised him from the dead

Jesus said that we have to become like little children if we are to share in his familiarity with God (Matthew 18:3).

He asked people to trust this God who cares for us (Matthew 6:25-34), and to address God in prayer with that simplest and most trusting of words (Matthew 6:9).

<sup>1</sup>Paul an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but by Jesus the Messiah and God the Father who raised him from the dead

Paul speaks of God as ‘Father’ three times in the opening four verses of this letter. He wants the Galatians to remember that God is the source of life – for his Son whom he ‘raised from the dead’, and for all who share with Jesus the life of the Spirit.

Luke tells us of the joy experienced by the Gentiles in Galatia when they found that they, too, were welcomed into the community of those who shared Jesus’ life (Acts 13:48). Paul wants them to recall that joy and to remember what happened to them when they listened to Barnabas and himself and believed in the love of the God who sent the missionaries to them.

## Galatians 1:2

<sup>2</sup>and all the members of God's family who are with me. To the churches of Galatia:

Paul is not alone. He writes as a member of a community.

Paul is writing 'to the churches of Galatia'. In a Christian setting, the Greek ἐκκλησία denotes those who have been called into community and who are assembled for worship.

## Galatians 1:3

‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah

The customary Greek greeting was χαίρειν (see Acts 15:23; 23:26). Paul uses a similar sounding word, χάρις (‘grace’) – a greeting that reminds the Christian assembly of God’s action in their lives in drawing them to share the life of the risen Jesus – a life of communion in love with his Father through the shared bond of the Holy Spirit.

Paul’s prayer for the Galatian churches is that they will continue to experience the graciousness of God pouring out his love upon them.

## Galatians 1:3

‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah

The customary Jewish greeting was shalom (‘peace’ εἰρήνη). Paul repeats this greeting here, for his prayer is that they will experience the peace that is the fruit of grace: the fullness of life that happens when each member of a community contributes his or her gifts to the others in harmonious communion.

## Galatians 1:3

‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah

It will soon emerge that Paul is amazed and horrified that a number of the Galatians, so recently converted to Jesus, have been persuaded by those who would set up divisions among them, and who would play on their insecurity by insisting on the need for boundaries that clearly demarcate the area of the sacred in ways that ignore the very essence of what God is doing in Jesus.

Through Jesus peace is being offered to the world. It is one of the first casualties of the kind of sectarian teaching which is dividing the new Christians.

## Galatians 1:3

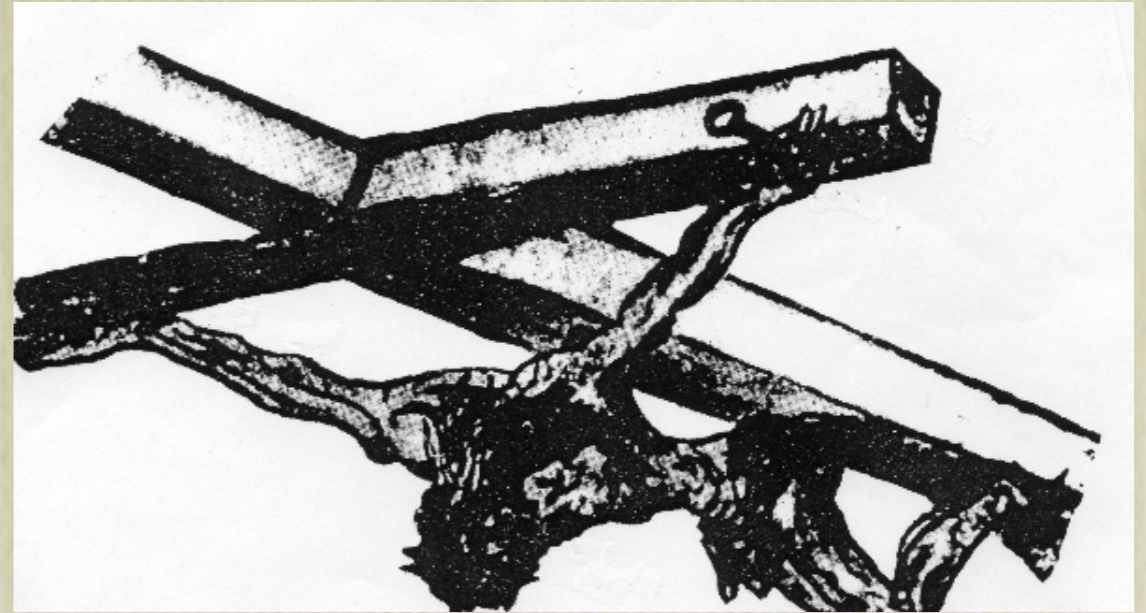
‘Grace to you and peace from God our Father  
and the Lord Jesus, the Messiah

Paul has already called Jesus ‘Messiah’ (1:1). Here he adds ‘Lord’, a title which has a range of meanings. When Paul calls Jesus ‘Lord’, he is referring to him as the Messiah raised to glory, who has demonstrated among the Galatians the power of God’s Spirit, primarily by forming the community itself, but also by the ‘miracles’ that were done there through Paul and Barnabas (Galatians 3:5; Acts 14:3,10). The Risen Jesus is filled with the power of God – the power of redeeming Love.

YHWH (see Exodus 3:13-15) ‘was in the Messiah, reconciling the world to God.

## Galatians 1:4

‘the Lord Jesus, the Messiah,  
who gave himself for our sins to  
set us free from the present  
evil age, according to the will of  
our God and Father



Sketch by John of the Cross

- From the outset Paul reminds them that Jesus is the one who ‘gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age’. Paul repeats here what he said when he first came to Antioch in Pisidia: ‘By this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses’ (Acts 13:39).

gave himself for our sins to set us free  
according to the will of our God and Father

If we really want to be free we must put our trust in what God is doing in our lives through giving us a share in Jesus' Spirit. Jesus' self-offering is a revelation of God's love that is powerful enough to attract us away from the many ways in which we fail to do God's will, the many ways we become lost and distracted. Furthermore, it is life-giving, making the journey of repentance possible, leading us to forgiveness and salvation.

Jesus is the source of the Spirit which the Galatians have experienced. This is because he was obedient to the 'will of God our Father' which was to make of himself a gift of love. As Paul writes elsewhere: 'God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us' (Romans 5:8).

There is no substitute for the giving of self in love. This is not something which we can do just by our own decision, or which we can learn by joining a group or fulfilling certain prescribed actions. We must open ourselves to Jesus' gift of himself to us, to the grace and peace that come from Jesus and from his Father. Living Jesus' life is the fruit of his gift. There is no other way.

## Galatians 1:5

God our Father to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.'

Paul praises God and invites the assembly to join him as they had done so often when he was among them, and cry 'Amen'.

This letter is very much about freedom, and it is significant that here in the opening address Paul speaks of Jesus self-giving as the way in which God willed to liberate us from the many ways in which we find ourselves being enslaved. Paul is thinking precisely of the way in which the missionaries from Judea are enslaving the Gentile Galatians by insisting that they must change their culture and become Jews if they wish to benefit from God's offer of salvation. Such an idea is anathema to Paul, for he knows from his own experience that God loves us as we are. Redemption – that is, freedom from slavery – comes when we open our hearts to welcome God's unconditional love. It does not come about by thinking, in our insecurity, that we have to become someone other than we are and be pressured into conforming to a narrow view of God that is being imposed on us from outside.

## Galatians 1:4

‘the Lord Jesus gave himself for our sins to set us free according to the will of our God and Father.

Since we are here at the heart of Paul's gospel it is important to reflect on the relationship between Jesus' self-giving, especially in his response to the crucifixion in Paul's writings. This opening address is a good place to start for Paul's focus is perfectly clear: we are redeemed by Jesus' gift of himself; we are redeemed by love.

## Some preliminary observations

1. Jesus revealed God as Love (self-giving)
2. Bible is human responses to God's inspiration
3. Inspiration: poetry in a poem. Music in a song
4. Inspired responses. People found that the words helped them get in touch with God's active presence in their lives
5. Error must be challenged. The words (whether in the Bible or in Councils do not lock the truth into propositions. Rather, they are sparks that light up a path and a direction to what is necessarily mysterious
6. I offer the following in the hope that it might provide some sparks.

Sinful human beings 'lifted up' Jesus on the cross. God 'lifted up' Jesus into his eternal embrace in the resurrection. This was Paul's message in the synagogue of Antioch in Galatia: 'Though they found no cause for a sentence of death, they asked Pilate to have him killed. But God raised him from the dead' (Acts 13:28,30).



The crucifixion of Jesus would have to be defined as an unjust act. God does not will an innocent person to be sentenced unjustly to death. Paul includes the murder of Jesus with the persecuting of the Christians as acts that 'displease God' (1Thessalonians 2:14-15).

The Sanhedrin and Pilate condemned Jesus to death because they refused to listen to God; they refused to face the truth. Their action was sinful, and so, by definition, contrary to God's will. Jesus himself says as much: 'You kill me because there is no place in you for my word' (John 8:37).

God's attitude to sending his Son is expressed beautifully by Jesus himself in a parable which directly refers to his passion. It is about a man who planted a vineyard and kept hoping to enjoy its fruits. Everyone he sent to deal with the tenants was murdered or badly treated: 'He had still one other, a beloved son. Finally he sent him to them, saying, **"Surely, they will respect my son."** But those tenants said to one another, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours." So they seized him, killed him, and threw him out of the vineyard' (Mark 12:6-8).

God sent his Son to 'give his life', in the sense of making every moment a love-offering of himself to others. Jesus gave himself to the leper and to the paralysed man; he gave himself to the sinners, the prostitutes and the outsiders; he gave himself to carrying out the mission of love given him by the Father. This self-giving brought him up against the resistance of those who refused to listen. When, sinfully and resisting the Holy Spirit, they determined to effect their evil purpose, what was he to do? His mission looked like a failure. The religious authorities were not listening. There was division even among his chosen disciples, who did not appear to be strong enough to carry on without him. Death must have seemed to Jesus to make no sense. He needed more time to do what he knew his Father wanted him to do. There had to be another way.

Yet, as sometimes happens, the sinful decisions of other people left Jesus no room to manoeuvre. Heroically, he determined to continue carrying out his Father's will. He determined to continue giving his life. He determined to continue preaching the good news of God's saving love, knowing that the religious authorities did not want the truth to be spoken. He determined to remain prayerful, forgiving and patient, and to continue taking the side of the poor who were crying to God for help.

On the night before he died he shared with his disciples what his approaching death meant to him: he made his death, as he had made everything else, an offering of love. When it is said that his death redeemed us, we mean, rather, that it was the way he died (Mark 15:39). His death was brought about by others. The way he died, however, was determined by Jesus himself, and his manner of dying — in prayer, and faith and love and forgiveness and compassion — gave the final demonstration of the extent of his love (John 15:13).

It was this love-giving, this self-giving, this life-giving that God willed. Thanks to Jesus' fidelity to his Father's will, not even the injustice and disobedience of those who crucified Jesus could thwart God's eternal design. What we see when we contemplate Jesus' self-giving on Calvary is the power of God.

It is important that we distinguish between power and control. The good news is precisely that real power, the power of God, is not a matter of control. It is a matter of love. Were it a matter of control, we would not be 'set free'. What we would claim as religious obedience would be a servile submission to a controlling God, not a free, creative response in love to love. We would bury the wonderful gift of freedom, lest we offend (a key theme of the Letter to the Galatians, as we will see). We would spend our life being careful, failing to live lest we make mistakes. We would be victims of superstition, caught up in trying to control God, to manipulate God into being on our side. We would conform, as the Gentile Christians of Galatia are being tempted to conform, to whatever religious system offered security (in their case, the Jewish system).

If, on the other hand, when we contemplate Jesus on the cross, we come to see that the power of God is not in the sphere of control but of love; if we see that God respects human freedom even when it behaves as atrociously as people behaved in crucifying Jesus; if we see that Jesus' faith in God was not destroyed by the pain, degradation and humiliation of the cross, we might dare to welcome the grace to embrace the freedom offered us. Recognising God as love, we might allow God's graceful Spirit to create in us, as God did in Jesus, someone who dares all for love. Later in this letter Paul will say: 'For freedom Christ has made us free!' (Galatians 5:1).

If we believe the gospel proclaimed by Paul, we will not fear God. Rather we will fear our own capacity to fail in love. We will dare the journey of freedom, knowing that we are constantly graced by love. We will not avoid life and its risks for fear of God's punishment. Rather, we will take seriously the gift of freedom given to us by God.

Knowing our capacity to abuse freedom, we will humbly cry out to God in our need and in our poverty, knowing that God will grace us with his Spirit. Purified by love and sensitive to the presence and action of God's loving Spirit in our lives, we will dare to express love in the kind of creative self-giving that we see in Jesus on the cross.

When we focus on Jesus' relationship to us, another consideration emerges. What Jesus did stands as an example for us. He shows us how to listen to God no matter how terrible our circumstances may be. His resurrection holds out hope for us that God will vindicate us just as he vindicated his Son. Jesus shows us that when people behave badly towards us we do not have to respond in the same way. 'Love one another', he said, 'just as I have loved you' (John 15:12).

However, his example would have had little power to persuade us had he not suffered. Suffering is part of the human condition, and Jesus' example is all the more powerful in that we see him loving even when everything was against him.

‘In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him’ (Hebrews 5:7-9).

Jesus demonstrated his faith in God’s love even when nothing supported such faith. He also showed us how to respond in love even in the worst situations. It is this which makes his message so convincing. It is this which draws us to follow him.

We needed to see Jesus loving on the cross, not because God demanded a crucifixion, but because nothing less could convince us that in our suffering we, like Jesus, are surrounded by the unconditional and persistent love of God. Suffering, even when unjustly inflicted, does not prevent God loving us and does not have to stop our loving.

We needed to see Jesus believing and forgiving, despite being faced with ultimate rejection and the apparent meaninglessness of doing so. For now, no matter what happens to us, we are able to 'look on the one whom we have pierced' (John 19:37), and learn from him the secret of a love that alone can free us from becoming lost in a maze of sin.



Part of the Stations of the Cross by Patrick O'Carrigan msc

Jesus' example and the Spirit of love that he gives us from the cross make it possible for us to give meaning to our sufferings by making an act of faith in God, and allowing the Spirit of his love to transform our cross into a resurrection like his.

If, in our human way, we are to imagine God responding to the crucifixion, we should imagine God weeping, as Jesus wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). When Jesus wept over the city, we see God's reaction to all the terrible injustices that we humans inflict on each other by our sinful rejection of God's loving inspiration. God is all-powerful, all-powerful love, and from the broken heart of God enough love pours out over this world to transform it into a paradise, if only we would welcome it.



In making us free, God takes our freedom seriously, permitting our decision to say No to love, and so permitting the consequences of such a decision. But God does not stand by as a passive observer of our folly. God is actively inspiring everyone to bring love to flower where it is absent. If we follow the example of those who crucified Jesus, and refuse to listen, we must not blame God for the effects of this refusal. Through Jesus it is revealed to all who are willing to look and listen that God is love. Some rejected this love.

Like the people in the desert who struck at the rock (symbol of God), so those who murdered Jesus struck at his heart with a lance. Just as Moses saw water flowing from the rock to slake the thirst even of those who were rejecting God (Numbers 20:11), so the Beloved Disciple saw blood and water flowing from the heart of Jesus on the cross (John 19:34) for the healing even of those who were crucifying him.



There in that darkest place, in that most meaningless event, in that symbol of humanity's rejection of God, love shines forth. God did not will the unjust murder, but God did will the love-response; for it is God's love that is revealed in the heart of Jesus. It is in this sense that one can say that the death of Jesus came within God's providential plan, so that 'by the grace of God, Jesus might taste death for everyone' (Hebrews 2:9).

'When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realise that I AM, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me. And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him' (John 8:28-29).

When Jesus said in his agony 'Not my will but yours be done' (Mark 14:36), he was expressing his determination to continue, in the face of death, to carry out the mission of love given him by the Father, whatever the cost. He trusted that, in spite of the apparently meaningless death and the apparent failure it represented, his Father would see that the cause entrusted to him would succeed.



Part of the Stations of the Cross by Patrick O'Carrigan msc

When Jesus' early disciples searched the Old Testament, the ancient testament of Israel, in an effort to make some divine sense out of the crucifixion, they discovered there a constant pattern of God's love persisting through rejection. In this sense, Jesus' dying fulfilled the Scriptures, bringing to a stunning climax the revelation of divine love in the history of God's people. Jesus' way of dying, and God's taking him into his embrace in the resurrection, are at the centre of the Christian faith, revealing as they do God's love-response to human disobedience.

Our disobedience matters. It matters that we sin, and that our sin has such terrible effects on ourselves and on other people. God cannot pretend that things are other than as they really are. Sin, however, cannot change the truth that God is love. This love, demonstrated in the way Jesus died, is the source of all our hope. If we believe it, we may dare the journey out of sin. If enough people believe it, there is still hope (a hope we renew each time we pray the 'Our Father') of realising Jesus' dream of God's will being done on earth as in heaven.

## Galatians 1:1-5

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