

**All notes on this page—Philip Ryken:** *Ryken, P. G. (2005). Galatians. (R. D. Phillips, P. G. Ryken, & D. M. Doriani, Eds.). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.*

**CHRIST CRUCIFIED | The resurrection of Jesus Christ is gospel truth, but by itself, the resurrection is not the gospel.** Although it proved God's victory over death, it did not take away our sins. This is where the crucifixion comes in. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul describes that saving event by saying that the Lord Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4). **This verse teaches four important things about the cross of Christ.**

**First**, it shows the willingness of Jesus to go to the cross. The crucifixion was a voluntary self-sacrifice.

**Second**, this verse shows the purpose of the cross. The reason Christ gave himself away was "for our sins" (Galatians 1:4). A transaction took place on the cross. We were the ones who deserved to die because we owe God an infinite debt for our sin. But Christ took our place on the cross. He became our substitute, our sin-offering. He gathered up all our sins, put them on his own shoulders, and paid for them with his death. Thus the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was not merely an example of supreme sacrifice, but an actual atonement for sin. It enabled God to forgive us by satisfying his pure justice.

**Third**, this verse shows the effect of the cross. Christ was crucified "to deliver us from the present evil age" (Galatians 1:4). When we think of the cross, we usually think first of the atonement. As we have

seen, Christ died to pay for our sins. But Christ was also crucified to emancipate us from this evil age. The gospel is a rescue, like being released from servitude or freed from prison.

Even though we continue to live in this evil realm, we are being rescued from it through the cross. The age to come has burst into the present age. We ourselves no longer have to live the way we used to live when we were under the power of evil. Already we are beginning to live the life of the age to come, when God's will is always done.

**Fourth**, this verse shows the origin of the cross. Christ died "according to the will of our God and Father" (Galatians 1:4). The execution of Jesus of Nazareth was not an unforeseen tragedy, a mere accident of history; it was part of God's plan for the salvation of sinners.

The cross had been in God's mind from all eternity. Thus it demonstrates the love of God as well as the love of Christ. There could be no conflict within the Trinity, as if a loving Son had to rescue us from an angry Father. On the contrary, the willingness of the Son was in response to the Father's will. The Father does not love us because the Son died for us. Rather, the Son died for us because the Father loves us. The cross had its origin in our Father's heart.

**TO GOD BE THE GLORY | The crucifixion and the resurrection, the cross and the empty tomb—these are the simple facts of the gospel.** The good news

is that Jesus Christ, whom God raised from the dead, gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father.

**\*\*\*These facts do not contain a single word about anything we do. [My emphasis.] They simply document what God has done in human history through Jesus Christ. The gospel is not about what we do for God; it is about what God has done for us.** God the Father is the one who came up with the gospel plan. God the Son is the one who made the willing sacrifice, in keeping with the Father's will. God the Father is the one who raised Jesus from the dead. Together the Father and the Son accomplished our salvation through the cross; together they announce it to the world through the teaching of the apostles; and together they apply it to our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

**Therefore, all the glory goes to God**, which is precisely how Paul ends the beginning of his letter: "To whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (Galatian 1:5). If salvation is God's work from beginning to end, then all the honor and majesty belong to him forever. Literally, his glory "is into the ages of the ages," which, unlike this present evil age, will never pass away.

If all the glory goes to God, what comes to us is only grace, which is what Paul's letter to the Galatians is all about. It holds out "grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:3). These are not pious clichés; they are God's free gifts for sinners. Grace is the favor God has shown to undeserving sinners through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And grace is exactly what recovering Pharisees need.

**In other words, the church without the gospel would look very much the way the evangelical church looks at this very moment.** We cannot simply assume that we have the gospel. Unless we keep the gospel at the center of the church, we are always in danger of shoving it off to one side and letting something else take its place. Martin Luther rightly warned that "there is a clear and present danger that the devil may take away from us the pure doctrine of faith and may substitute for it the doctrines of works and of human traditions. It is very necessary, therefore, that this doctrine of faith be continually read and heard in public." The good news of the cross and the resurrection must be preached, believed, and lived. Otherwise, it will be lost.

The church's greatest danger is not the anti-gospel outside the church; it is the counterfeit gospel inside the church. The Judaizers did not walk around Pisidian Antioch wearing T-shirts that said, "Hug me, I'm a false apostle." What made them so dangerous was that they knew how to talk the way Christians talk. They used all the right terminology. They talked about how they "got saved." They told people to "trust in Christ." They "presented the gospel."

Only they did not have the gospel after all. **We should expect, therefore, that the most serious threat to the one true gospel is something that is also called the gospel.** The most dangerous teachers are the ones who preach a different Christ but still call him "Jesus."