



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

GALATIANS 1

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JEALOUS FOR GRACE

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Trauma and terror reign to the degree that the truth, crystalized in the good news of God, does not. "News" should be an announcement of an aspect of truth that ultimately aligns with God's Truth. Sadly, that is not always the case with today's media or even within the church. Throughout history, God's revelation of Truth peeked through His creation, but there came the day when He spoke fully and finally in the person of His Son. God became a human and lived righteously, the way Adam and Eve were designed to live. He is blessed with all the benefits of perfect obedience to God's covenant requirements. His perfect sacrifice of His own life satisfied justice and pardoned us from our death sentence. His resurrection both vindicated His sacrifice and began a new creation. His

ascension established His rule over all that His blood purchased as He sent the Holy Spirit to rule in the hearts of His people to display His rule in every interaction with creation. This kingdom is operating today as we anticipate the final culmination of His purpose of enabling the cosmos to praise Him for His glorious grace.

The bedrock foundation of truth is the news that God has acted in grace. Our redeemed life is totally a gift and does its work only when it is received as a gift from God with no strings attached. It is not a commodity that can be bought, bartered, achieved, or paid back. It is vital that we recognize that this gift is for a group - His community of faith. It is ours to embrace as members of His body, but it can't be truly appreciated

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if it is seen as just an individual salvation. The promised land of the Old Testament era pointed toward an inheritance that included everything that would be purchased by the blood of Jesus the Messiah. That inheritance is the very life that is shared by the Holy Trinity and Christ's body.

The issue that is paramount today is not the Covid-19 virus, nor the identity politics of intersectionalism. It's not social justice, nor the Supreme Court, nor the Green New Deal, nor the China-threat, nor the global economy... The biggest issue under protest is the nature of truth and specifically the purity of the gospel of grace as proclaimed by the early apostles. There are so many variations of the narrative that go under the term "gospel." In our current culture, we are told that there is no one clear and absolute truth to be proclaimed and that whatever we think we know is partial at best and totally subjective. We should not be surprised that there is an attack on the gospel that produced the New Testament. Hell's strategy has aimed its most potent weapons at the one power that transforms people from orphans to sons, from slaves of darkness to beacons of eternal light. In his letter to the Roman church, Paul stated that the reason he was totally committed to announce the good news to the whole world was his conviction that every

person was depraved because of sin and that the announcement of God's act of redemption is the *only* power of God unto the salvation that liberates humans from all the tentacles of sin and law.

I suggest you take time to read Galatians 1:1-24, allowing the seriousness of the issue to grip your heart. Paul is filled with anger at the attempts to tamper with the gospel. He reminds his readers that he has been sent by none other than God the Father and Jesus the Christ. His authority is from heaven and not from any earthly institution. The enemy of truth is perverting the news sent from God to earth. To pervert is to reverse the order. Paul states the proper order very clearly in his introduction:

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ..."
(Galatians 1:3 NRSV).

Only grace produces peace, and it always does. Peace is the harmonious operation of life energized by the resurrection life of Jesus. Grace is The Gift. It is the humbling recognition that there is nothing I have or could ever have that could buy what is given. It is the risk of receiving something that by its very nature will transform me into the likeness of the Giver "who gave himself" (Galatians 1:4 NRSV). In that

act, Jesus released the power of the age to come into the present age with the result that those who receive the gift are delivered from the strangling powers of this age. This age is characterized by transactions. All relationships and negotiations are swapping something for something else. In relating to almighty God, we have nothing to swap. We are dependent on His mercy and hope in His grace.

The letter to the Galatians is somewhat different from Paul's other correspondence with the churches. There is an issue that must be addressed. It is threatening the life of the church, thus the welfare of the world. Paul knows there are some few things that warrant swift action. The purity of the news from God is that important. To allow tampering here is to condemn the future to destruction, to render religion powerless, and to relegate mission work to human efforts at making life a little better for a little while. Those who use religion to coerce people into obedience to laws and principles will compete for which laws and how much obedience. The only obedience that matters is the complete obedience of the God-man to satisfy all covenant requirements, and the obedience that issues out of a heart of love for God and those whom He loves. The order of the good news kind of life is: The

Giver gives Himself. The recipient is changed by the gift to become a giver. Givers don't manipulate or dominate, but stimulate others to drink deeply of the gift of grace. When we observe the behavior of one who is giving because he has been given to, we notice he is acting righteously. It is inevitable. Of course, obedience to God is important, but until it issues from the transformed heart, it is religion without love, and that is as useless as a tingling cymbal.

This is not a casual matter for Paul. He states twice that *anyone* who proclaims a news contrary to the one originally announced is to be accursed. He includes angels and even himself in this proclamation. This is astounding to us because we have grown accustomed to spinning our message to attract people and to avoid offending those who have no ear for the sound of the good news from heaven.

“Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10 NRSV).

This is a very important verse in this text. It explains the tempting motivation to tamper with the good news from God in order to “please people.” It is so counter-cultural and

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counterintuitive to receive a gift with no strings attached. We want to get a bargain, but not admit to abject poverty in negotiations. Often we hear of warnings of cheap grace. Usually those issuing the warnings are trying to get us to add strings to the gift. They seem to be saying that a gift that does not first procure promises to act differently because of the gift is cheap grace. I rather think that cheap grace is the kind that thinks I can give God part of my time, one tenth of my money, and part of my heart in exchange for salvation. What can pay for or pay back the blood purchased gift of full redemption?

It is not natural for people to understand the grace-nature of the gospel. So we who preach it are tempted to alter it a little to get a better audience. We, like all humans, would rather be accepted, liked, and affirmed than not. We do care what others are thinking about us. This need for affirmation can be deadly. It must be met head-on with our intimate relationship with the living Jesus who has accepted us fully and has called us to be His messengers. We don't have the prerogative to change the message. It is His message, and we have been conscripted to identify with it to the degree that those who reject it will not necessarily think well of us. Being a bondservant of Jesus is the greatest privilege and the greatest

safeguard against people-pleasing. When we are conscious of His presence and pleasure, the lure of public opinion fades. Without His smile in our hearts, we are vulnerable to the temptations to change the news to "make it more relevant." It is relevant in all seasons. It answers the transcendent questions of every heart. It doesn't need refurbishing. It requires announcing in its clearest form.

God and those who have been captured by the gospel of grace are jealous for it. It is the God-ordained power unto salvation for all humans and the only long term hope of the nations of the world.



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