



DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

GALATIANS 4

JANUARY 2022

GRACE MAKES GRACIOUSNESS

*The inevitable fruit of grace
in a person's life is graciousness toward others.*

We are living in a time when graciousness is rare. Vitriol and contention are the more common modes of relating. Efforts to solve this growing cancer in our society don't seem to be effective. It's not that we can't see the problem. It's that we can't see the deep root that is producing it. For instance, racism is not primarily about color of skin or societal structures that still show evidences of it. It cannot be solved by coming to the table of reason unless that reason is informed by grace. We could tear down all the systems and structures that we have put in place to make society work and replace them with new ones, but soon enough they would be exposed as faulty because selfish, fearful hearts made them.

The New Testament proclaims a message that addresses the root cause of the racism problem as well as every

other problem that sin's intrusion into God's order produced. "...it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek" (Romans 1:16 ESV). The salvation referenced here is every arena of life that needs restoring. Paul is speaking of the gospel - the good news of God's rescue of His world. It was this singular message that had captured Paul and propelled him to throw himself totally into fulfilling the commission given to the people of God to bless the whole world with the blessings that are in Christ alone. It is this singular message that Hell hates above all. The strategies of evil are constantly attacking the purity and simplicity of this message. Man-made religion is Hell's favorite weapon to destroy the transforming impact of this message in the world. In Galatians 4:8-20, we can see how the gospel

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attacks racism and other maladies when applied in simple faith.

Paul visited the area of Galatia because of a change in plans. Something drastic had occurred that produced a physical infirmity that was severe enough that it presented a test of the church there. Perhaps Paul was disabled in some way as to need assistance to be mobile, or perhaps he was disfigured so as to be awkward in public. In any case, when he arrived and proclaimed the message of the gospel, it was so amazing that the people could see him in the Spirit and valued him as if he were an angel from heaven or a special delegate of Jesus Himself. They would have plucked out their own eyes for him. (This is not a medical description of his infirmity. It was a common saying that meant they would do anything for him.) It makes us want to know what was in that message.

We can find the core of it by reading the whole letter to the Galatians, as Paul reminds them of the original message he gave them. He had told them that the coming of Jesus was the fulfillment of the promise made in the Garden of Eden and then enlarged in His promise to Abraham and Abraham's descendants. God had promised that the seed of woman would crush the head of Satan. He promised that the seed of Abraham would be the One who would bring blessings to the world instead of the curses brought by sin.

The physical seed of Abraham turned into the nation of Israel. God chose this people to be His instrument of bringing blessings on all that sin had cursed. Paul explains the mystery of God's grace by carefully placing the Law in its proper place in the story. It was not only the most explicit instruction on how to live in God's world with God, but it was the kindergarten teacher to prepare a people for a Savior. The Law promised supreme blessings on those who would live by its stipulations. It also described the curses on disobedience. Of course, humans living under the delusion that they could live up to the requirements by their own will power were delighted to get such a deal. But they soon discovered they couldn't do it. They tried many times but ended up experiencing the curse of violating the covenant: exile. After 400 years of waiting, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham. Jesus came to earth not only as a man, but a Jewish man: Israel in one person. He fulfilled the covenant requirements and paid the penalty of all the curses. God worked through a singular seed to fulfill His promise. He did use Israel to bless the world. His purpose is to continue to use the people of that ultimate Seed to bless the world by proclaiming and demonstrating the good news. That seed is the body of Christ made up of all races, tribes, and cultures who have believed in Jesus as God's solution to the world's dilemma.

This is no mild message. It is radical.

It declares that all the distinctions that characterize people do not give them status nor value. The overriding commonality is their relationship to Jesus as Lord. As far as leverage with God goes, there is no difference in Jew and Gentile, male and female, rich and poor, slave and free. When the Galatians first heard the gospel, this became a reality for them. They did not see Paul primarily in the flesh. They saw him in the Spirit and valued him as Jesus does. The gospel of grace invariably makes people gracious. But something happened after that first glorious interchange between Paul and the people took place. The Galatians had become offended by Paul's weaknesses. They began judging him on the basis of his appearance and resume. He did have a jail record. He did have scars all over from being rejected by respectable authorities in different cities. He was not impressive as a communicator, at least as compared with the pseudo-apostles who were promoting their own version of the gospel and boasting of their success and prosperity. When they began adding to the simplicity of grace, they lost their graciousness. This text addresses the issue.

The Galatians were returning to elemental principles. For the Jews, it meant returning to the Law in addition to the gospel Paul preached. For the Gentiles, it meant reverting to the fear and superstition of false religions. Since sin entered the Garden of Eden,

humans have been subject to the demon-hatched principle that we must take the initiative in moving God to bless us. *"If you will.....then God will."* It is intuitive to us all. Unless we have been captured by the glory of the gospel of God's actions toward us in love, we will all go back to the beggarly principles of transaction. The human ear itches for a fresh challenge to do something to get God to do something to bless us. New teachings are always blooming in the garden of religion to attract those eager to find the new discovery of how to win His favor. The pseudo-teachers were promoting a message that appealed to those wanting to be in the inner circle of God's blessings, and their way was to add in some of the Torah (Law) which had been central to Jewish identity for centuries. It is a powerful temptation. Peter fell for it in Antioch. So did Barnabas. It sounds so right. After all, we are the ones who messed up. We must take the initiative to fix it. There are convenient verses of scripture that can be tweaked to authenticate such a posture. Some choose to take the promises to the ethnic Israel of the Old Testament literally and apply them to the political Israel of today. They are neglecting to recognize that Jesus is God's Israel who fulfilled that destiny. Some read where early on God promised Abraham that those who blessed Him and His descendants would be blessed, and they conclude that we can get certain blessings by being kind to the nation of Israel and

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other blessings by trusting Jesus. So the distinction between Jews and Gentiles remains problematic. If Jewish bias in the church is legitimate, ethnic bias in culture is legitimate. However, racism of all kinds is eradicated in the gospel perspective. There is no racial, ethnic, economic, gender, or class bias. All God's favor goes toward Jesus - the obedient man/Israelite. Any blessings humans get are based on being in Him. When this dynamic reality is in our hearts, we know each other the way Jesus sees us and there is no place for judgmentalism, criticism, or bias.

Some have complained that Jesus was defective in the scope of His teaching by not addressing slavery and racism. He did. He cut the root of both when He broke down the wall that divided Jew and Gentile. The unity of the body of Christ gives hope to the world in turmoil. There is a people who genuinely loves each other beyond familial, ethnic, gender, geographic, social, and economic distinctions. Vitriol does not have to rule the day. There is a balm in Gilead that soothes the sin-sick soul. It is the gospel that declares that God took the initiative and has already done all that needs to be done to reconcile man to God and to each other. It is a gospel that has the power of God's arm behind it. It is our only hope. We must give up our partial gospel that produces more division than ever and embrace the one true gospel that destroys everything that

alienates us from God and each other.

God does have a special people. There is an inner circle. It is very elite. It is one person: Jesus. He alone gets the inheritance. He alone is the ruling man on the throne. When we trust Him, we are "in Him." Everything we get is based on that relationship. No other identity markers matter. Trying to gain leverage by anything we have or do is futile and insulting to grace. Since all of us who are in Christ came the same way, there is no room for dividing into superior and inferior. We are one in our common need for salvation. We are one in our dependence upon His grace. We are one in our faith. Having received grace, we are gracious. We look with the eyes of the Spirit to see as Jesus does. That perspective only comes to those who receive grace.

Graciousness comes only from embracing grace fully.



P.O. Box 2022
Colleyville, TX 76034
(817) 267-9224
Email: Contact@KerygmaVentures.com
www.KerygmaVentures.com