

# God's Glory in the Gospel of Grace

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] So, we're going to think about those three verses in his introduction from verses three to five, and think together about God's glory in the gospel of grace. And I think as we begin, it's important for us to recognize that in the first place, this text is not really about us.

When you think about where the focus and attention falls, it's all on the God of glory. It's all about the grace that he shows. It's all about the gospel, the good news of his rescue mission. And we can push that further to recognize that one of the important lessons that the Bible teaches us is that our lives are not primarily to be about us. For those of us raised in the catechism, our primary purpose, our chief end, is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever, to find our joy in recognizing that his glory is our greatest good. And when we come to a text like this and to a letter like Galatians, we can absolutely say that primarily our salvation is not about us, but it's about God and it's to his glory. It's all about, the focus falls on the gospel of grace. God the Father who sends the Son, God the Father who plans for salvation, God the Father who calls, the Spirit who gives new birth, Jesus the one who comes and dies in our place. We receive the gift of faith, God the one who starts the work of salvation and finishes the work of salvation.

Everything is from God so that God would get all the praise and the glory. And that's how Paul begins this letter. And it's important, I think, for us to hear that because this is our great need as people that we would always be seeking and finding true glory. Because by nature, I think without exception, we are all glory hunters. We are all glory hunters in the sense that we are always looking for something to give our hearts to, something that we will find our great joy and satisfaction in, and that will always lead us towards particular kinds of temptations. We might find, seek to find our glory in our good grades or in our good looks. We might be tempted to find our sense of significance and self in our careers or in our children. We might be aspiring towards finding our glory in our workplace or in what we purchase with our wealth, and finding the approval of others or resting in the abilities that we have. We're all looking for glory. Like people on the beach that you sometimes see with the metal detectors, you know, spending hours combing the beach, searching for great treasure, waiting for the buzz that says there's something here. Let's dig in. Our great need as people, and certainly our great need as Christian people is to seek and to find the right treasure. To think about the difference of the joy when we find true gold versus digging down, discovering the rusty tin can. We need to aim high to see and to pursue the God of infinite glory. That's the treasure that we want to seek, to be humbled, to be captivated by the worth and the majesty of Almighty God who's been so good as to send His Son to save us.

And that's why Paul writes his letter. He writes this letter to these Christians, recent Christians, to defend the gospel of grace and glory. And Galatians is a really powerful letter. It's very different to his other letters. There's no greetings. There's a real sense of urgency. He doesn't pull any punches.

There's a really strong defense of the gospel, which has come under attack. We got a sense of that in our readings. There are evidently, verse 7 of chapter 1, people throwing them into confusion, trying to pervert or to twist the gospel. And Paul says, if anyone does that, let them be under God's curse. He begins chapter 3 by suggesting that they've been bewitched. They've come under this spell of false teachers who are trying to tell them, no, you don't just need Jesus, you need the old Jewish laws. And so he launches into a passionate defense of the gospel of grace.

[ 5 : 19 ] Now, why does he do that? If we stop and think about it. Now, these false teachers are saying that we can achieve a level of righteousness by effort and by law-keeping that will earn our way into the kingdom of God. There are those who are suggesting that we must contribute something to our salvation. Yes, trust in Jesus, but you must also bring your goodness, bring your obedience, bring your Sabbath observance, bring your dietary laws. It's, yes, it's Jesus, but it's Jesus plus something else.

And why does Paul attack that false teaching so severely? Because he is concerned for the glory of God. And if we contribute to our salvation, then to me belongs at least some of the glory.

And that's not the gospel. That's an absolute twisting of the gospel. Because what does that do? That steals glory from God. If I'm contributing to my salvation, then I have in some way earned it, and then it ceases to be grace. It ceases to be gift. It makes amazing grace a small thing.

And so Paul writes this letter to defend the gospel so that God gets the glory. And so I thought it'd be helpful for us to begin the gospel this way. Martin Luther, in his commentary on the book of Galatians, reminds us that the gospel is the principal article of the Christian faith. And he says, We always need to remind ourselves and to remind others of the gospel. The song on repeat in our lives needs to be the song of amazing grace in Christ alone so that to God be the glory.

So for a few minutes, let's get hammering. We'll think about grace. We'll think about gospel. We'll think about glory. Let's read verse 3 again. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. What is grace? Grace is God's unmerited favor. Grace is God showing loving kindness to those who don't deserve it. In fact, grace is God showing loving kindness to those who deserve the exact opposite. We deserve condemnation, but instead by God's grace and kindness, we receive love. Grace is also God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. God in Christ Jesus is the one who saves us, when without Him we would be spiritually lost and spiritually dead. God in Christ, by His grace, puts us in right standing with Him so that by faith in Jesus we are declared righteous. We can never be righteous enough, good enough, holy enough for God by ourselves. Our salvation, our position, our righteousness comes as a gift through the work of Jesus. So you've maybe heard the acronym for grace,

[ 8 : 56 ] God's riches at Christ's expense. That's grace. Jesus goes through that experience of becoming a curse so that we enjoy blessing God's riches at Christ's expense. Grace is also the truth that God freely chooses to save us. That was there in verse 4. This all happens according to the will of our God and Father. God doesn't save us because He looks down on people and He sees some particular merit or goodness in a Christian and goodness in a Christian and says, this one deserves my salvation and forgiveness. God doesn't look into the pages of future history and say, this one will live such a good life and have such a good track record that they of all people deserve my loving kindness. No, God loves us because He chooses to love us. It's nothing of us. It's all of God. And grace is this golden thread that runs all the way through Galatians. And again, we heard some of this in chapter 1 verse 6. There is this reminder that grace is what we live in. It's not just that grace saves us, it's also that grace that sustains us to live the Christian life. So He can say, I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ. Grace is the air we breathe.

Chapter 3 is an extended reflection on the story of Abraham, the man of faith. And to flip to chapter 3 verse 18, if the inheritance, if receiving the blessing depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise. But God in His grace gave it to Abraham through a promise. And it's point, Abraham received the gift by grace, and so do we. To enjoy the promises of God, the blessing of God, it's a gift freely given. Or chapter 5 verse 4, here it is negatively, you who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ. You have fallen away from grace. To put that positively, Paul is saying, grace is the way to live the Christian life of joyful obedience with full freedom.

So grace is central to Galatians because grace is central to the gospel, but we need to understand that grace is absolutely counter-cultural. The operating system of our world, the air that we breathe, is that you work hard in order to get reward. It's why we encourage children and young people to study hard, so they'll get good grades.

We encourage people to work hard, so they'll get the right job, so they'll get the promotion. You put in the hours, you get the rewards. It's even there in the power of advertising. If you can find and purchase the right product, happiness is yours, status is yours, recognition will be yours.

It's the operating system of our world. But if we apply that system to how we get to know God, it becomes a real problem. If a person thinks, well, here's what I must do. I must bring my good deeds, and I must bring my moral religious performance. I must bring my record of attendance at church or Bible reading or prayer. And if I've got enough to bring to the table, then surely God will be pleased with me and accept me and must reward me with salvation. And the gospel is absolutely opposite to that.

[ 12 : 55 ] Christianity doesn't work that way. It comes as gift. And so grace has that function of humbling us.

To enter the kingdom, we must go through the low door of repentance and humility and come in on our knees, aware of our weakness and our need of mercy, understanding that actually we are way more sinful than we ever imagined.

And we are far more helpless than often we like to admit. But at the same time, the wonderful truth of God's grace also gives us a humble confidence. It lifts us up, as it reminds us that God in Christ Jesus has freely shown us love. He has freely provided salvation.

He's given us all the glory that we need. And it's a gift to receive by faith. Paul also reminds us here who gives grace. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace comes from God. It's all from God. He gives us this unmerited favor, which brings peace. The peace of restored relationships is a gift from God.

As Christians, the fact that we are no longer God's enemies, that we are no longer estranged and far away from Him. That's a gift. That we can have peace in our conscience. To know that we are not condemned because we're trusting in Jesus, that's a gift of grace. And so, grace is the air that we breathe, and it's something that we celebrate. Before moving on, whenever we talk about grace, we inevitably, I inevitably, talk about John Newton. Did you know John Newton's most famous hymn, Amazing Grace, was a New Year's hymn, all the way back in 1773, to be sung in the small church of Olney, an invitation to reflect on the kindness of God over long years. Amazing grace.

[ 15 : 22 ] Grace. And it was something he understood and lived by in his personal experience, having been saved from being a wretch, as he was happy to describe himself, to become a pastor. All his life, he understood the beauty and the wonder of grace. His last recorded words to a friend the day before he died, there are many things I have forgotten, but these two things I remember. I am a great sinner, and God is a great Savior. Grace is how we live. It gives us that humble confidence.

Well, from grace, let's move to think about the gospel in verse 4. Paul's train of thought continues, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and favor. So, here is this really condensed summary of the gospel, the good news at the heart of our faith, which serves to bring glory to God. If you're here tonight and you're not a Christian, this is something that you need to know and to experience for yourself. And if you are a Christian, this is our story. These are truths to rest in and to pass on to others. So, let's ask some basic questions that get us to the heart of the gospel. First of all, what does this verse say about who we are?

And the answer is that we are those who need rescue. According to this verse, we are those who are spiritually helpless and spiritually lost, and we need rescue. We need a rescuer.

So, we don't need, as the false teachers were saying, more religion and more law-keeping. Our need is greater than more education or ethics or some kind of moral top-up. We need Jesus, the rescuer, who said in Mark 10 verse 45, He came to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.

The idea of the ransom price was a price that was paid to release someone from slavery or from a debt they couldn't escape from or because they were a prisoner of war. So, imagine someone held in a prison in a deep, dark dungeon, unable to rescue themselves. That's the position that we find ourselves in as Jesus describes in Luke chapter 19 verse 10, Jesus said, He came to seek and to save the lost.

[18:12] And so, Christianity is unapologetically a rescue religion. Jesus is, first and foremost, a rescuer. And we are a people who stand in desperate need of rescue. And it's interesting to notice what Paul says we need rescued from. He gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age.

This is like Bible shorthand to describe the nature of life ever since the fall into sin, way back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. Ever since mankind turned their back on God, rejected His Word, decided that we wanted the glory and we wanted to take God's position, salvation. Life has been marked by sin that leads to death. And there is the reality of the slavery of the devil. And so, Jesus comes on a rescue mission to bring in the new age.

In the coming of Christ, there is this new power. God has invaded His creation, and through the work of Jesus, by His grace, sin has been removed, and eternal life has been provided, a new creation, a new creation, breaks in, and to enjoy life in the new age. We need Jesus to rescue us. It's the gospel.

So, if we are those who need rescued, who is Jesus and what did He do? We've already thought about the fact that Jesus is the rescuer. And notice the language at the beginning of verse 4, He gave Himself for our sins. Here is the language of sacrifice and substitution. Here is a reminder that Jesus came in order to die on the cross. The cross is God's way for sinful people to be put right with Himself. It is the way of atonement for sin to be removed, for the penalty to be paid, as Jesus faces the wrath of God on our behalf. The gospel says that trusting in Jesus, we are shielded and saved. The punishment that should fall on us falls on Jesus instead. Or to move into the courtroom.

The book of Revelation reminds us that Jesus has been appointed as God's judge. But the wonderful thing about the gospel is that Jesus, the judge, is judged in our place. The sentence of death is passed on our sin and rebellion. But it's Jesus, the judge, who goes into the dock and who takes our sentence, and who faces the penalty in full. So that as Christians, we can live knowing the verdict, God's verdict on our lives is already in. That Jesus died in our place. That God is pleased with that sacrifice. We know that because of the resurrection. So if we're trusting in Jesus, we know our sins are fully and finally completely forgiven, and there is no condemnation for us.

[ 21 : 36 ] And what about the Father in the gospel? Notice that Paul says, end of verse 4, all this is according to the will of our God and Father. It reminds us that God the Father authors the rescue plan. It's not Jesus acting on his own and forcing the Father reluctantly to save us. No, the Father in love sends the Son according to his will. That the God of grace willed his people's salvation. That before the world was even created, God the Father willed that he would set his love on his people, that he would choose them, and that he would send his Son to come and die in our place for our sin. God willed that his Son would be the only means of salvation. God willed that the Spirit would come to open blind eyes and dead hearts to receive his love and grace so that all of salvation tends toward his praise and glory. God's work of salvation through Christ doesn't simply open up the door of possibility for salvation. So salvation might happen if people will turn and trust. No, it's accomplished. It's definite. It's effective. That absolutely we must believe, we must respond, but that faith that causes us to respond is itself a gift of God. That not one of us would be willing to become Christians unless God worked in our hearts to make us willing to repent and to believe.

So having thought about those realities in the gospel, let's just pause for a moment and let me encourage us to be praying in light of the gospel. If you're not yet a follower of Jesus, to pray to ask God for the humility required to see your need of the Savior, to pray that God would work to soften your heart to the wonder of Jesus, to open your heart to him as Lord and Savior.

And as we pray, if we're Christians, as we're praying for friends and family and colleagues, let's remember that because salvation is a gift of God and God is powerful, He is able to save people.

The people we've been praying for for long years, we can keep on praying, trusting that God is powerful. And as we think about the good news of the gospel and the urgency of the gospel, at the start of the year, let me encourage us all to be praying about our gospel mission, both collectively as a church, but also personally. You know, what comes from our pulpit week by week, but also as we're going about our business and we're sharing our personal faith.

To pray for opportunities to communicate clearly who Jesus is, what Jesus has done, what Jesus means to us. To pray for courage and joy that would point people to Christ our King. That as we would understand, we have this rich treasure in the gospel that we wouldn't just hoard it to ourselves, we want to share it with others. Well, that's grace and that's the gospel. The third G to think about is glory, because that's where Paul ends in verse 5, having reflected on God's grace and the gospel. He says, to whom, God the Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

[ 25 : 43 ] Perhaps to help us to see why Paul finishes this way. When people look at a wonderful statue, if you like art and you see a wonderful statue, you think about Michelangelo's David, I guess is a famous example. You don't find people sort of gazing and wondering and saying, well done, that rock. Great job. We know, don't we, that as we look at a sculpture, we say, all glory belongs to the artist. That's where praise properly belongs. And so, it's right and proper and fitting that as Paul recognizes God the author and artist in the good news of our salvation, as he is the one who is able to carry out this rescue mission on those who without him would be spiritually dead, as he gives us life, as he shapes us into the image of Christ, as he prepares us for eternal glory, he recognizes that all glory belongs to him from beginning to end. And so, as he concludes this introduction to his letter, this defense of the gospel of grace, he says, God alone is worthy of eternal glory. This God who makes peace, God who reconciles sinners, making peace through the blood of Jesus, the God who rescues sinners by the cross of Christ, defeating sin and death and the devil to give us forgiveness and eternal life. This is the God of grace and glory, the God who deserves all praise and glory. So, as we come towards the end, what should we do with this? How do we respond to this truth and to this God? Let me suggest a couple of resolutions for us. The first one, let's resolve to enjoy the gospel.

Tom Schreiner in his book on Paul's theology uses a building image. Lots of people are asking the question, what's at the center of Paul's thought and theology, or what's the foundation for his mission? What is it that gives him sort of great joy and purpose? The leading thought? Tom Schreiner uses the idea that the foundation of Paul's theology at the heart of his mission is God's glory in Christ Jesus. That's the foundation upon which all other truths are built. Let's enjoy how wonderful and glorious our God is.

And let's seek to know more of him in this coming year, to change the house, the building image. Think about a palace. Imagine you've got freedom to explore a palace where every room offers fresh delights and wonderful treasures. That's the Word of God. That's the gospel. That's the glory of God.

Wherever we look. And we have opportunity to discover new and wonderful things about our God and our Savior. So, let's enjoy God together in His Word, letting His glory lead us to praise as we see in Paul.

How can we grow to enjoy more of God's glory? There's lots of ways, I think, practically. Perhaps at the start of the year, it's the time to figure out a reading plan, or a plan of some podcast you're going to listen to, or a Bible reading plan, where you're going to be able to make time to stop and to think about great truths.

[ 29 : 43 ] And to do that with the desire, I want to see more of God's glory, so that my joy would more and more be in Him. I want to increase my appetite in the goodness of God, because I need it for my own faith. And also, the more excited I am about Jesus, then the more likely I am to talk about Him in my witness.

Still some good books up there that can certainly stimulate our thinking. Let's embrace the wonderful truths of the gospel, that God is the author of salvation, that He alone saves, that Jesus has paid it all, that what God starts, God finishes, that we are free, and we must leave behind every thought of, I must save myself. I must work myself into God's good books. Rather, we can rest and find joy in Christ alone. When we mess up and when we fail, and we will, we can celebrate the gospel of grace that renews and restores. We can cling to the truth that nothing separates us from the love of God that's in Christ Jesus. Let's make it our aim this year to be glory hunters, treasure seekers in the very best sense. Remember Jesus' words, where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Let's find ourselves following hard after Jesus. Let's enjoy the gospel. Second resolution to suggest, resolve to explore the gospel. Again, if you're not yet a follower of Jesus, understand that this is the most important message you'll ever hear, the most important person you'll ever encounter, that each one of us personally needs to know God's King and the

Savior for sinners. Resolve to read one of the gospels for yourselves. Take one of the copies of a gospel back there. Ask big questions. And as Christians, we can also be resolving to explore the gospel, to know more of its beauty, and to explore it with others. Because we know, don't we, so many people around us have got a wrong view of Christianity. So many people around us, so many people around us, so many people around us, so many people are blind to their eternal condition, so many are deaf to the claims of Christ, they are dead in their trespasses and sins.

And God is pleased to use His people as a way for light to break in, for God's love to be communicated and felt. So let's pray for courage and love to share.

When we run a Christianity Explored course, which we'll hope to do in the next month or so, be thinking and praying already, who can I invite to come and share Mark's gospel with us?

[ 32 : 58 ] Or even now, as we're about to, I guess for most of us, about to get back into the routines of school and work, think about your weekly routines. How can you make room, how can I make room to encourage someone else with some of the wonderful truths of the gospel?

You know, when you discover something good for yourself, we instinctively, we want to share it. How can we make that true as we're exploring God's Word? Maybe we're thinking about with our children, or with our husband, or our wife, or with someone that we spend time with regularly.

God is glorious. The gospel of saving grace is eternally glorious.

So may this be a year for us of celebrating God's grace in the gospel, of getting to know this God better, and of holding out this wonderful treasure so that others can enjoy it with us.

God bless you.