

(Galatians) Living in the Age to Come

by Brian Brodersen

This sermon explores the significance of Galatians in understanding the gospel and the importance of comprehending the implications of salvation by grace alone.

Duration: 50:13

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Galatians 1:3-5

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Eternal Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes that the words he is about to share come from God. He explains that when the apostle Paul writes his letters, he always begins with a greeting of grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus. The speaker then focuses on verse four of the passage, highlighting the nature, object, and origin of Christ's death. He emphasizes that being filled with the Spirit leads to experiencing the age to come and escaping the present evil age. The sermon concludes with a prayer for the enjoyment and experience of the life of the age to come and a reminder of the reality of heaven and the anticipation of Jesus' second coming.

Transcript

And tonight we will begin a study through Paul's epistle to the Galatians. And in the second verse we see that this epistle was written to the churches of Galatia. Galatia was a Roman province in what is today Turkey.

The modern capital of Turkey, Ankara, was also the center of Roman government for the province 2,000 years ago. The region was named after the Celtic tribes that had settled there from Gaul. Now Gaul is modern day France, and so the Celtic tribes moved from Gaul over into that region and that's why it became known as Galatia.

It was into this area that Paul went with Barnabas on their first missionary journey. Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derby were the cities of southern Galatia where Paul established churches. So it would be to these churches that he is now writing.

The occasion of the letter was unfortunately unpleasant. This is one of those letters that's sort of unique out of all of Paul's letters because in each of his other letters he has some word of commendation to the church. Even though the churches might have had problems, he had some word of commendation to them, some good thing to say about what was going on.

But unfortunately he wasn't able to do that in this letter to the Galatians. Many of the Galatians had turned against Paul through the influence of false teachers who had come to town after Paul's departure. These false teachers challenged Paul's claim to apostleship and they contradicted his message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

They taught that salvation was for Jews only. So in order for Gentiles to be saved, they must become Jews by being circumcised and keeping the laws of Moses. They despised Paul's message that Gentiles could be saved by simply believing in Jesus Christ and they did their utmost to undermine that message.

So Paul writes this letter in defense of both his apostleship and his doctrine. The very first verses of the epistle, he immediately begins a defense of his apostleship. And then for the first two chapters, that's more or less what he deals with.

He sort of gives a personal testimony to affirm his apostolic calling. And then in the remainder of the epistle, he defends the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone. And he masterfully shows the fallacy of the false teachers and the foolishness of those who have believed them.

The doctrinal content of Galatians is very similar to the doctrinal content of Romans. And like Romans, Galatians played a significant role in the reformation of the church in the 16th century. It was the reformers who brought the great truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone so powerfully expounded in Romans and Galatians.

It was the reformers who brought that back into view after approximately 1,200 years of obscurity. Think about that. That which we today, in a sense, take for granted, especially us here at Calvary Chapel who have been taught so well.

We take for granted the doctrine, salvation by grace alone, through faith alone. We take it for granted. But for 1,200 years, it was obscured.

Very few people had, during that dark, dark period of time, a true understanding of the gospel. But it was through the books of Romans and Galatians that the reformers got in touch with this doctrine once again. And both Romans and Galatians had a tremendous impact on the life of probably the chief reformer, Martin Luther.

And so this is a book that has been used powerfully by God historically. And Galatians is important for us today because an understanding of the grace of God is vital to a healthy and spiritually prosperous Christian life. And I think as we go through it once again, we are going to find ourselves just being thrilled at the grace of God.

When we come to understand that God's love for us is so rich and it's free and it's there for us to simply receive it. And it's not about me having to somehow work myself into God's favor, but God favors me already in Christ. And as we begin to expound those things, I think that we will find ourselves being greatly encouraged.

And so Paul begins this epistle by claiming for himself the very title, which the false teachers were evidently denying him. He begins, Paul, an apostle, not from man nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God, the father who raised him from the dead and all the brethren who are with me. Paul, an apostle.

Now, most of us are familiar, I think, to some degree with Paul, who he is. And those of you that have been here on Saturday nights for a while, you remember we studied the entire book of Acts. So we got to know quite a bit about the apostle Paul as we made our way through the book of Acts.

But a question does arise that I think we need to address once again. I think sometimes we just assume that everybody has thorough knowledge of these things, but that's not necessarily the case. The question is this.

What is an apostle? Can anybody be an apostle? Or was that a role, an office, a position that was reserved for just a select few in history? Just exactly what is an apostle? That's how Paul refers to himself. And as I said already, that is an area that these false teachers were attacking. They were calling into question the validity of Paul's apostleship.

They were insinuating that he wasn't really an apostle. But Paul affirms that he was indeed an apostle. An apostle is a special messenger with a special status enjoying an authority and commission that came from a body or person higher than himself.

An apostle would be the designated representative of another. And so Paul was a designated representative of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was commissioned.

This apostleship, as he tells us here, was not from men or by man. You know, this thing we call the ministry is something that God places people in. It's not something that we choose for ourselves, nor is it something that someone else chooses for us.

The ministry is something that is appointed to individuals by God. Paul's calling was to be an apostle. But it wasn't his own idea.

It wasn't the idea of some other guys that got together and said, why don't we lay hands on him and send him out as an apostle? It was God's plan. So he was an apostle, not of men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead. Paul, just like back in these days, has been attacked quite ferociously, even down to modern times.

And it's not uncommon, even in these days, to hear people speaking out against Paul, the apostle, speaking in a derogatory fashion, criticizing him, referring to him as a bigot, and things of that nature, and disregarding his statements in Scripture, and challenging, even today, the validity of his apostleship. Isn't that interesting that 2,000 years later, the guy who's been in heaven for so long is still under the gun? He's still being attacked. Now, what we need to understand about apostles is that they are sort of the New Testament equivalent to the prophets in the Old Testament period.

And the prophets were not expressing their own personal opinions about God, but they were speaking on God's behalf. The same is true with the New Testament apostles. You know, there are people today who want to dismiss the things that the apostles said, particularly Paul.

They want to just disregard it. They want to act as though it has no weight or authority. It was simply the opinion of a bigoted individual.

Therefore, we can just throw it out if we don't like what he said. But here's what we need to understand. To reject what the apostles said is to reject what God said, because the apostles are the spokesmen for the Lord.

And in the sense that Paul was an apostle, and Peter was an apostle, and John was an apostle, and James was an apostle, and Andrew was an apostle, and Simon and the others, in that sense, there are not any other apostles today, nor have there been since those early days. They made up a unique group of God's servants who were extraordinarily equipped for that particular day and age to bring to completion the written Word of God. And once the apostles passed away, their ministry, in that sense, passed away with them.

So there's no such thing as what is called in some churches apostolic succession. That the apostles had successors that they laid their hands on, and that these men then inherited the same authority that they had, and thus today in our churches some would say we have full apostolic authority through apostolic succession. There's nothing about apostolic succession in the scriptures.

The apostles in this sense of Paul's apostleship, they carried out their ministry and fulfilled it in the first century of the Christian era. Now, since then, there have been other men with apostolic type of ministries, and actually, as you look in the New Testament, you find that there are apostles in this first sense, like the original twelve, but then there are also apostles in a secondary sense. There are apostles that were sent to certain peoples and regions for the purpose of establishing God's work and so forth, but their ministry did not have that final and absolute authority like the original apostles did.

And I firmly believe that we still have apostles today along that order. You can look at it like this. God the Father had one apostle, Jesus Christ.

We are told in Hebrews that Jesus Christ is the apostle and high priest of our confession. God the Son, Jesus Christ, had twelve apostles. God the Holy Spirit has many apostles, but each one had a different level of authority.

Of course, Jesus had absolute and total authority. The apostles had that kind of authority to an extent that was imparted to them through Christ. They had that authority to speak for Him.

But then those apostles that have come since then, those men that have been gifted by God and called by God to take His Word into places and to establish the church and regions, they do have an authority that comes from God to enable them to do that, but their final spiritual authority is rooted back in the ministry of the original apostles that is preserved for us in the Word of God. So as we sort of survey church history, we can look and we can find different men who we would be able to identify as apostolic in their ministries. Or you could think of some of the men that pioneered things after the apostolic age that kept the gospel spreading and going into other nations, men like Polycarp, and on throughout that first thousand years or so, you can find different names of men who were apostolic in their ministries.

You can find that to some extent with some of the reformers as well. You find that with those who were instrumental in the great revivals, like the Westleys, for example. You would find that with a person more recently, like a J. Hudson Taylor, who took the gospel into China in a profound way back in the middle 1800s and laid the foundation for really the next 150 years of Christianity in that country.

You would find that with people even in modern times who have gone into, say, South or Central America or into portions of Africa or into places where they have just gone in and really established the work of God and spread the word of God and planted churches. Pastor Chuck, as some of you know, just this week visited Brazil, and I picked him up from the airport yesterday, and he was reminding me about the couple that he went down to visit. There's a property there in Brazil that they had established a ministry base on

some 45 years ago, and now they're retiring and they want to turn that ministry base over to Calvary Chapel.

So Pastor Chuck went down with a few others to sort of spy out the land. And anyway, in the course of our conversation, he was talking to me about this couple, and he was reminding me of something that they had told us, that in the 45 years that they had been down there, they had literally planted hundreds of churches. They'd just gone into villages and shared the gospel, people got saved, they disciplined and raised up others, and then churches were planted.

And so there are hundreds of churches as a result of their ministry. That's what we're talking about in this other sense of apostle, people who were called to a place and given a special gifting by God to pioneer a work in that place. Marilyn mentioned tonight working with the Markey family, and in many ways, George Markey was sort of the apostle that God called to go to the Ukraine.

He went there and basically, as far as Calvary Chapel ministry goes, there wasn't anything that was going on. And God's used him to establish the work there. And now many other churches have sprung up and the word is spreading.

And I think of, you know, some of our other friends in different parts of the world. I often refer to my good friend, Greg Opin, in Hungary as the apostle of the Hungarians. He moved there 13 years ago to see what God will do, and he's never come back.

And it's doubtful that he ever will come back. And as we look at what God is doing over there, we see that God has used him. All of the churches that are established in some way or another have a little bit of a connection to him.

And so Paul was an apostle in that extraordinary sense. And he and those others that were familiar with their names, their apostolic ministry was for that period of time to lay a foundation to finish the written word of God so it might be passed on to the successive generations. But then there is this other dimension of apostleship that we still have with us today.

But of course, our ultimate authority rests in the written word of God that came from them. We don't have that same authority to write scripture or to speak for God in that direct, absolute sense apart from his word that the apostles and prophets did evolve. So Paul, remember again, he's being challenged.

These guys have come in to the fellowship that he planted, that he nurtured, that he had been responsible for the birthing of these works, and they've come in and they've attacked his claim to apostleship. And so Paul writes them and he affirms, I am an apostle, not from men, because what they would have said is, now, was Paul part of that original group? Was Paul there with Peter and James and John? Do they recognize Paul's apostleship? Do they acknowledge his authority? You see, that's how they would have come in and attacked him, and that's the kind of doubt they would have tried to plant in the minds of the people. So Paul says, my apostleship is not from men.

No, it wasn't that Peter one day discovered Paul and said, hey, you ought to be an apostle. You've got the gifts. Nor did that happen with John or any other.

We know what happened. Jesus Christ met Paul on the road to Damascus and converted him and called him to be an apostle. And so that's how he introduces himself to them once again.

And then he says to them, and this is the only word of, at this point anyway, the only commending kind of thing that he gives to them initially. He says, grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, this is the way that Paul would greet the churches when he would write to them.

He would take the common greetings of the day, but yet in those common greetings, the essence of the gospel was contained really. Grace was the common greeting among the Greek speaking peoples and peace was the common greeting among the Hebrews, but yet contained in those two terms, you know, the gospel was sort of there itself in those two terms. And of course we find those terms used over and over again, not simply in greeting, but they're used over and over again in the writing of the New Testament.

Grace is mentioned over and over again and peace is mentioned over and over again, but it's grace and peace. You see, it's because of the grace of God that we have peace with God. And it's when I comprehend the grace of God in my own life that I experience the peace of God in my own life.

It's when I embrace the grace of God that I have peace with God. It's when I comprehend the grace of God that I have the peace of God. You see, I can actually embrace grace and have peace with God, but because my comprehension is low or my understanding is not what it should be, I can still live in an agitated state.

I can still live in a state of turmoil and unrest, not having the peace of God. Why? Because although I've been saved by grace, I don't fully understand the implication of that and somehow I'm thinking that I've still got to do something to, you know, either perfect my salvation or keep myself saved, and so that keeps me in sort of an unsettled position and I never really get to experience the peace of God. But once I get a hold of the grace of God and what it really implies, how the grace of God means that God's done it all and all I'm doing is just resting in it, I'm just believing it, that results in me having the peace of God that passes understanding.

Oh, I have great peace because I know that it's not dependent on me. It's not something that I've got to do to make sure that ultimately I make it to heaven. Lots of Christians, truly Christians saved by grace, have peace with God because of the fact that they're saved by grace, but they don't have the peace of God because they don't understand the implication of grace.

That's why studying Galatians is going to be great for us because we're going to be able to get to all of the implications of the grace of God, just what this means. And Paul, as we get into his addressing the Galatians, he's going to be saying to them, oh, you fools. What are you thinking? What are you doing? How is it that you had this great encounter with God and you experienced the power of God and the miracles of God and everything else, and now you're turning to these other things? You think that that's the way to perfect your salvation? Paul says, having begun in the spirit, you think you're actually now going to perfect that by adding the flesh to it? And what he's really striking against is the idea that somehow we are going to come along and add to what Jesus did.

You see, Paul sees that as a complete affront to God. Paul sees that as the ultimate sort of slap in the face to God, that we would think that somehow we could add to what Jesus did, that we could make it better, that somehow there was something lacking and our contribution would then perfect it. Paul sees that as the height of folly, and that's what he is going to attack and destroy as he addresses these Galatians.

But it's grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. You know, also in this greeting, I don't remember if I've mentioned this to you before, but one day it struck me that in these particular greetings, notice, because it's grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus, this is where we have the New Testament equivalent of thus says the Lord. See, back in the Old Testament, the prophets would often remind their listeners that they were speaking for God.

They would say, thus says the Lord. And that drove home the point, God is speaking. Interestingly, when Paul writes his letters, he says grace to you and peace.

He didn't say grace to you and peace from me and from my friends along with me. He always says grace to you and peace, and sometimes he adds mercy, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus. This is the New Testament, thus says the Lord.

What he's saying is what I'm about to say to you comes with grace and peace from God. What I'm about to say to you is from God. And of course, that's what an apostle does.

He speaks for God. So he says it's grace and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us or rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now, there are three things in verse four that I want you to notice with me. In verse four, we are given the nature, the object and the origin of Christ's death. And I want to talk about each one of those for a moment.

First of all, the nature of the death of Christ, who gave himself for our sins. The death of Christ was primarily a sacrifice for sin. That is primarily what it was.

We talked about that in our previous study, how there's all kinds of confusion about why Christ really died. But the clear picture from the law, from the prophets, from the words of Jesus himself, who would say that he came to give his life a ransom and so forth, down to what the apostles wrote, the primary purpose for the death of Christ was a sacrifice for sin. Now, another question that is being asked presently as a result of, once again, the passion of the Christ is who's responsible for the death of Christ? And you know, it's been a real controversial thing, and I won't go into that.

We've already discussed that. But we're told here, we're told that the nature of Christ's death was primarily as a sacrifice for sin. The origin was in the will of God the Father and in Jesus who gave himself.

So, although there were human players who were indeed responsible for their actions, ultimately, the death of Christ as a sacrifice for sin originated with God. It was God's plan. But it wasn't merely the plan of God the Father imposed on a reluctant son.

It was indeed the plan of God the Father, and Jesus willingly agreed to the plan. And of course, because of the oneness between the Father and the Son, I can't imagine that the plan was conceived independent of the Son. I don't think that's even a possibility that God the Father would one day, you know, sort of be stroking his beard.

You know, son, I've been thinking. I've got a plan, and I want to share it with you. Now, you know, hear me out before you respond.

I don't think it happened that way. Because I don't think you can make that kind of distinction between the persons. Of course, what God the Father would know, God the Son would know as well.

And so, really, it was a plan that originated in God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Each one would have a particular part to play in the plan. And of course, God the Son would play the part of being the sacrifice.

But what I want to concentrate on for a moment is the object of Christ's death. And he tells us here that he might deliver us from this present evil age. The word deliver can also be translated rescue, that he might rescue us from this present evil age.

And notice how Paul describes the age. It's an evil age. Now, what is he talking about? What age is he talking about? Back in just his day, was that the present evil age? Is he talking about the final days that we might be living in where times would get worse and worse? You know, what he's actually talking about is the whole scope of human history.

You see, the Bible divides history into two ages. This age which began with the fall of man and the age to come. Now, here's an interesting thing.

It tells us that the age to come has come already because Christ inaugurated it. Although this present age has not yet finally passed away. So, the two ages are running their course concurrently.

The overlap or they overlap one another. Now, listen, Christian conversion means being rescued from the old age and being transferred into the new age, the age to come. The Christian life, listen to this, this is so important.

The Christian life is living in this present evil age, the life of the age to come. That's what the Christian life is. It's living in this present evil age, the life of the age to come.

You remember, Jesus came and he said, the kingdom of God is in your midst. The kingdom of God is right here, it's among you. And Jesus came and he preached.

Remember, he said, repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Now, what did he mean by that? He obviously did not mean the kingdom in its literal physical sense because it didn't come then, did it? It was postponed in a sense because the subjects of the kingdom rejected the king, but yet it wasn't postponed in another sense because the kingdom of God then began to be set up in the hearts of individual men and women who would submit themselves to it. And this is what the Christian life is.

It's living in this present age, the life of the age to come. That to me is such a great description of what this is all about. And again, I know I keep going back to this theme, but again, these things are just striking me.

You see, the present age is an evil age. It always has been. It always will be.

There's no changing that in the overall sense. It is what it is. It will be what it will be.

And to a large degree, there's no way to alter that, especially the ultimate outcome of it. Do you know the funny thing? And incidentally, with what Doug said about that official there up in Canada talking about a utopia, you know, all of these revolutions that the world experienced in the 20th century, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia, the cultural revolution in China, the Nazi revolution in Germany and all of that sort of thing. You know, every one of them, from those who perpetrated them, every one of them were billed as

the bringing in of a utopian society.

The bringing in of the ultimate form of government, the ultimate civilization, the perfect way of living. That's what they were all billed as. Those men behind the Third Reich, they talked about a thousand-year reign.

Mao Zedong was going to bring in a 3,000-year reign, a 10,000-year reign. It's all this utopian thing. But far from being a utopia, these have been disastrous, devastating, utterly and totally destructive of human life.

But it's all an attempt to bring in the new age. And of course, there's another one coming. And that's what we see going on in our society today.

There are people that they want to see a new day come. They want to see a new age. They want to see a one-world system, a one-world order.

We're all living together on this one planet under the banner of green peace and PETA and all of these other kinds of things. And the United Nations just ruling over it all. And it's a utopia that they're striving for.

They believe that socialism is the ultimate form of government. And if you just get the right people in charge, they can implement it, and it will bring about utopia. But we know the story.

We know where it's really going to go. We know that what the communists did or what the Nazis did or what happened in China, we know that that is horrible as it was and as devastating as it was, it's minor in comparison to what's going to happen in the future. Point being, this is a present evil age.

And we can't change that ultimately. We can change it temporarily, locally at times through the grace of God and the power of God. But ultimately, we can't change where it's going.

It's going in a certain direction. But we're not supposed to be working toward that. We are supposed to be concentrating on living in the age to come in the midst of this present evil age.

You see, what we are supposed to be doing, like I've said before, but I want to say it again because I think it's clear in my own mind so I can communicate it more clearly to you. You see, we're supposed to be inviting people to come and live in the age to come instead of going out and trying to reform the present evil age, inviting people to come. Hey, there's a new age coming.

And guess what? You can experience it now. You can be part of it today. The kingdom of God is with you.

It's among you. It's in your midst. God calls us out of the world in a very real sense.

Now, of course, we still live in it, but we're not to be of it. We're not to be caught up in all of that and consumed by that. No, we are to be concentrating on living in the age to come, the age that is coming.

And that's what Jesus came to do. He came to deliver us from this present evil age and to allow us to live presently in the age to come. So I don't have to walk around all burdened.

I don't have to be depressed. I don't have to be overwhelmed by what's going on because, man, I'm living in the kingdom. I'm living in the age to come.

I've got heaven, a taste of it right here on earth. See, that's what the church is to be. A church is to be the place of refuge, a place where people come to get away from all of that.

And I think sometimes what happens is we come and we don't leave that outside. All we do is talk about how bad it is, how horrible, how miserable it is, and then we're failing to do anything about it. And then we all drag ourselves out of here like, oh, gosh, you're right.

I am a miserable, wretched, worthless, helpless sinner. I haven't done a great thing for God to alter the course of the nation this week. That is a burden that we're putting on ourselves that God's not putting on us.

He's called us to another kingdom, and we can live in this present evil world in the age to come because of what Christ did. That's why he offered himself for us. And so that's what we want to do.

We want to cultivate that, develop that, realize that, understand that. And you know what happens when that happens? We have joy again. We have peace again.

We're resting and not stressed out and all worried about what's going on around us because, you know what, the Lord's going to come. And in closing, I just want to say this. I remember when I first got saved back in the 70s.

You know, when I came here, you know what everybody was talking about? They were talking about Jesus is coming again. He's going to set up the kingdom. Man, it's so exciting.

Everybody was talking about the second coming of the Lord. We're 25 years closer to it, and we're not really talking about it that much anymore. We're all bogged down with politics and economies and social this and that and the other thing.

Man, those hippies, when they got saved, you know, they'd already just given up on society. And so they were excited to find out, wow, there's another kingdom. That's cool.

We didn't like being part of this one anyway. But, you know, the hippies became the yuppies, and then they kind of settled back in. But let's remember this as we close tonight.

The age to come has come, and it's come to our hearts. And so we can just, in a sense, we can get lost in this other world. But you know what? Here's the great thing, and I know this is true.

When we really do truly get lost in the other world, not as escapists or anything like that, but when we just are lost in the things of God, you know, we actually become lost in the things of God. We become more effective and productive for the world around us. We really do.

Because when you're lost in the things of God, you know what you are? You're filled with the Spirit. You're led by the Spirit. And you find that being filled by the Spirit and led by the Spirit, God's got plans.

He's got work. He's got things He wants to do. And He just leads you here, leads you there, bumps you into this person, runs you into that person, and boom, things are happening.

What's happening? People are coming out of the present evil age, and they're joining in with the age to come. They're getting to experience what Jesus came to bring us in our hearts, that He will come again to bring us ultimately. And so to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. We'll pick up in verse 6 next week. Lord, we thank you that you came, that you gave yourself for us to deliver us from this present evil age.

And Lord, may we, may we just enjoy the life of the age to come. May we live in it. May we, Lord, bask in it.

Thank you, Lord, that heaven is a reality. And it's not only a place we're going to, it's something that has come to us. And may we experience it to the extent that you would like us to here in this world.

We thank you that you are coming again, Lord Jesus. And Lord, may that great reality once again become a preoccupation with us in these days. In your name we pray.

Amen.

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