

Gospel Commission

Galatians 1:1-5

Peter Marshall, a former chaplain of the US Senate, loved to tell the story entitled “The Keeper of the Spring.” High up in the Alps in a remote Austrian village lived an old man. Years and years earlier when he was young, the town council hired him to clear away debris from the many mountain water pools that flowed into and fed the town’s spring. With faithful diligence, he quietly patrolled the hills and valleys removing leaves and branches. He cleared away the silt that would otherwise contaminate the fresh flow of water. After some time, the little town became a beautiful retreat for vacationers. The spring became a haven for swans, a home to lush gardens and farms, a source of income for mills and a delight to artists painting picturesque mountain panoramas.

Years passed. One evening the town council met for their annual business meeting and the newly installed treasurer brought up the salary that the town was paying each year to the Keeper of the Spring. He complained, “Who is this old man? Why do we keep him on year after year? Does anyone see him doing any work? For all we know he takes a salary without doing anything useful for it. I propose we save money by eliminating his services.” The town all agreed and so it was done.

For several months nothing changed. By early autumn the trees began to shed their leaves. Small branches snapped off and fell into the pools, hindering the rushing flow of sparkling water. One day someone noticed a slight yellowish tint to the water in the spring. A week or so later, the water had turned a dark brown. Another week went by and slimy, smelly film covered sections of the spring. The millwheels moved slower, the swans found other places to nest, and the tourists first complained and then disappeared.

The town council realized what they had done! They called a meeting and implored the Keeper of the Spring to take his old job back. After a month, the spring again cleared, the swans returned and the little village became a haven again.

This story relates to the letter to the Galatians. The spring is the Gospel of Jesus that brings life and beauty to all who possess it.

The Keeper of the Spring is the church and specifically her leaders. The Holy Spirit tells us that the Gospel is a treasure from God and that the pure

message will be under constant attack. When the church is not diligent to guard the Gospel, the Gospel will be tainted and ultimately lost to us altogether.

Much more devastating than the loss of swans and tourists is the loss of souls who perish when the pure Gospel is replaced by a putrid Gospel . . . when the clean Message becomes contaminated. Hear Paul's heart about this sacred responsibility as he writes to a young pastor named Timothy.

"O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you." (1 Timothy 6:20 [ESV](#))

"By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you." (2 Timothy 1:14 [ESV](#))

Application: God gives every elder in every church the sacred trust of keeping the spring of the Gospel pure. Yet this is a trust given to every church member too. The Gospel is a treasure from God to nourish us and the people we cherish. Let us labor to keep the Spring unpolluted.

Paul knows that the Pure Gospel will always be under attack. Satan hates the power of the Gospel to transfer people out of his kingdom into the kingdom of God's Son. So Satan takes the Message of the Gospel and he contaminates it . . . he twists its meaning so people cannot understand it and receive it by faith.

This is what is happening in the churches in the region known as Galatia.

Paul addresses this letter simply, "To the churches of Galatia:" (Galatians 1:2 [ESV](#))



This region is part of modern-day Turkey. If you read Acts 13-14, you will read about Paul's first missionary journey. In those chapters, Luke reports about Paul and Barnabas' ministry in four cities: Derbe, Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. Each of these four cities are located in southern Galatia. It is likely that these are the cities that Paul is writing to in Galatians.

What is the problem that Paul is addressing in this letter?

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.” (Galatians 1:6-7 [ESV](#))

We will teach more specifically as the weeks move forward about this “different gospel” that is being embraced by the churches in Galatia, but for today, **we focus on the fact that there is a BIG DOCTRINAL problem in the churches and we take note that Paul addresses this problem head on.**

Paul writes this letter to confront the error because he cares about the people who are veering off the path doctrinally.

Friends, every one of us are vulnerable to being moved away from the pure Gospel. (I hope no one hears me say that and thinks, “Not me!”)

In this letter, we will discover that even the apostle Peter and Barnabas were among those being overcome by this particular attack. We all need the help of our brothers and sisters in Jesus' church as we make progress in our walk with God.

In chapter 6, Paul assumes that church members will have to have hard talks with others in our own church family. He says,

“Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”(Galatians 6:1 [ESV](#))

A “hard talk” is a conversation where one person brings the weight of spiritual correction to another person. If we care about the people in our lives, we will sometimes have hard talks with them. The church is a spiritual family and hard talks are what healthy families have. In this letter, Paul is setting us an example how to have hard talks with people we love. We are right to observe **WHAT** Paul is saying and **HOW** Paul is saying it.

Main Idea: God calls every member of His church to have some hard conversations with other brothers and sisters in our church family. We can expect Satan to veer our brothers and sisters away from Jesus in doctrine and/or in practical living. Let us be ready to be God's instrument for good in each others' lives.

We open our Bibles to Galatians 1:1-5. Here Paul is setting the table for a very hard conversation . . . he knows that he is going to have to confront the members of these churches. Question: How many of you love to be told you are wrong about something that you believe?

Six Items for Setting the Hard-Talk Table

Item #1: God-ordained Relationship

“Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—” (Galatians 1:1 [ESV](#))

Paul begins his letter with his personal name. He is reminding them of their personal relationship that he has with them. He is saying, “You all know me and I know you. We are connected by mutual friendship.”

But then Paul uses his title, “an apostle”.

When you see the word “apostle” in the NT to refer to the special office that God gives to the 12 and to Paul, you are right to think of the term as starting with a capital “A”. The capital “A” of apostle stands for the Authority that an Apostle has in the life of a believer. This authority does not mean that apostles are sinless, but it does mean that they are the foundation for the church both past and present. The apostles authority continues to us in our day in that we still follow the apostles teaching. We still read what the apostles wrote as not being the musings of good men, but as communication directly from God Himself.

When we open the NT, we read the apostles and we submit to what they say about our life. **We submit to the apostles teaching regarding many eternal matters:** What we believe about God, about heaven, about hell, about salvation, about worship. **But we also submit the apostles teaching regarding many practical matters:** how we think of marriage, gender, sex, raising children, employment, government, truth-telling and a host of other issues in our everyday life. **If the apostles say it, we believe it as though God said it directly to us.**

When Paul opens the letter by reminding the Galatians that he is an apostle, he is reminding them of the relationship that God created between him and those he is having this hard talk with. Why does he do that?

Truth: The weight of hard talks is braced by the bridge of relationship.

The moment we begin to bring spiritual correction a person, their defenses are going to immediately be raised by the question, “Who do you think you are to speak to me about this? This is none of your business.”

Paul is reminding them that being an apostle by the will of God makes their doctrinal error his business.

“Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—” (Galatians 1:1 [ESV](#))

Notice that Paul highlights how GOD ESTABLISHED this relationship between them. This is not man’s doing, but God’s. When we come to faith in Jesus, God sets us in community with others. God establishes relationships for His good purposes in each of our lives. We cannot honor God if we do not honor the relationships that HE PLACES in our lives. So Paul begins the letter highlighting how God made him an apostle in their lives.

Since none of us are apostles today. The office of apostle is foundational and there are NO PRESENT DAY apostles in Jesus’ church, you might ask, “How do we apply this principle?”

We still are wise to imitate Paul by thinking about and then communicating the relationship that God has established. That relationship might be as an elder in the church. It might be as a Sunday school teacher. That relationship might be as a mom/dad/son/daughter/grandma/grandpa. That relationship might be as a brother or sister in Christ.

Whatever the relationship that GOD has established, it is wise to place that relationship on the table when you have a hard talk. For instance, you might say, “I am coming to you as your brother in Christ.” Or “I am coming to you as your mom.” Or “I am coming to you as your pastor.” **The hard talk table is best set with God-ordained relationship as the basis.**

This God-ordained relationship also reminds us that we represent God in our words and attitude toward them! We do not come simply representing our own interests, but God’s in the relationship that HE CREATED between us.

Item #2: Family Affection/Commitment

Notice the family references at the beginning of Paul's message to the Galatian churches.

*... but through Jesus Christ and **God the Father**, who raised him from the dead— **and all the brothers** who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: Grace to you **and peace from God our Father** and the Lord Jesus Christ . . . **according to the will of our God and Father,**" (Galatians 1:1-3, 4 [ESV](#)).*

*"For I would have you know, **brothers**, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel." (Galatians 1:11 [ESV](#))*

Paul communicates a message of correction in view of his commitment to them as brothers and sisters. He wants them to know that his affection for them is unwavering and resolute. He is not lashing out at them for rejecting the Gospel that he delivered to them when he was with them. **He loves them and cares for their present flourishing and their eternal joy.** To be silent on this matter is to be apathetic to the loss of God's pleasure and power in their lives.

"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." (Ephesians 4:25 [ESV](#))

Truth: Hard Talks put the blessing of the other person ahead of our relationship with them. The main reason that we avoid Hard Talks is because we care more about the relationship than we care for the person. We value the other person's approval more than we value their life.

Silence in the face spiritual danger is not the love of Jesus. This is the love of ourself.

"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." (Galatians 1:10 [ESV](#))

Truth: Often when we do get up the courage to speak to a brother or sister about a matter in their life that is sinful, we are often motivated by anger more than we are affection. Let us take care that our leading inspiration for speaking to a brother or sister is not **personal affront, but rather personal affection!**

Illustration: Behind a car at the stop light. The driver is looking at his/her phone and does not see that the light has turned green. What do you do? First, you may become exasperated at them. Then you may in frustration lean on the horn with a couple long blasts. **Does the person need to be alerted to the problem? Yes.** But is short, patient “beep” represents Jesus. They still may take offense, but that is because of their pride and not yours.

Application: As we set the Hard-Talk Table with our brothers and sisters, let us seek for the love from the Spirit to dominate our hearts. Then once God’s love for them fills our hearts, it is healthy to tell them that we love them.

Item #3: Grace-filled Intention

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,” (Galatians 1:3 [ESV](#))

Paul is not interested in venting his frustration, in getting something heavy off his chest, in giving voice to his displeasure, in defending his personal honor, in putting them in their proper place, or in winning an argument.

Paul is chiefly interested in bringing God’s grace and peace to them.

Principle: In grace, God gives us what we do not deserve. In love, God provides for us when we need. In mercy, God withholds from us what we do deserve. God’s grace, love and mercy brings to us a peace with God, with His people and within ourselves.

Paul’s intention for the Galatians is their good . . . their flourishing . . . their joy . . . their freedom. He prays that his words will have the impact of bringing grace and peace in to their lives. And He states that intention before he brings the correction.

Paul has to speak about a hard issue because grace and peace in their lives will vanish if they continue down the present road. If we turn away from the true Gospel we will lose God’s grace . . . the grace that frees us from the Law and its condemning power. If we turn away from the true Gospel, we will lose God’s peace . . . the peace that draws us near to God in fellowship and that comforts us in the face of death.

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17 [ESV](#))

Application: When we set the Hard-Talk Table, it is wise to communicate your kind intention. Ask the LORD to help you share the problem in such a way that the goodness of grace and peace will flow into the life of the hearer.

How opposite our own flesh sets the Hard-Talk Table. Rather than desiring and praying for grace and peace with people that we confront, our flesh draws us into wishing them ill.

Sometimes people even say, “I hope you rot in hell!” The word “damn” is not a curse word in itself. It is a fine word that describes God’s justice against man’s sin. The reason why the word “damn” IS a curse word is because man so often uses it in anger to wish God’s judgment upon other sinners!! What arrogance to take God’s place as Judge.

Notice what Paul says to those whom he must strongly confront. “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

When we set the Hard-Talk Table, let us remember that we are there for the benefit of the other person.

Item #4: Cross-centered Reminder

*“but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, **who raised him from the dead**—” (Galatians 1:1 [ESV](#))*

*and the Lord Jesus Christ, **who gave himself for our sins** to deliver us from the present evil age,” (Galatians 1:3b-4a [ESV](#))*

When we have a Hard Talk, the cross of Jesus is always at the center to our message. It might seem that the message of the cross is distant from some sin habit or doctrinal error in the life of a brother or sister, but the cross is ALWAYS the center of every God-centered correction. Why is that?

The cross reminds us of our sin nature.

The cross reminds us of God’s love.

The cross reminds us of the resurrection miracle.

The cross reminds us of the invisible, spiritual war.

The cross reminds us of our deliverance.

The cross reminds us of our fellowship.

The cross reminds us of our eternal purpose.

The cross reminds us of the peace God has secured for us.

Friends, let us never wander far from cross when we speak to each other about doctrine or about sin. The cross is relevant to every spiritual conversation. If we let the conversation veer away from the cross, the Hard Talk deteriorates into philosophical debate or into ethical justification. The cross brings a clarity and a power to our conversations that nothing else can.

Remember that we fight against an enemy who wishes to destroy our soul and our brother's soul. He is often successful and our only hope is Christ Jesus!

Application: When we set the Hard-Talk Table, we are wise to make the cross of Jesus a recognized and stated centerpiece.

Item #5: God-glorifying Purpose

*according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.”
(Galatians 1:4-5 [ESV](#))*

The main purpose that pushes us to the Hard-Talk Table is God's glory. We know that without this kind of communication within God's new community, God will not be glorified in his church. Sin will take root in a church members life and when unchecked, that sin becomes like leaven in their soul and in the whole of the church.

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” (Galatians 5:7-9 [ESV](#))

Doctrinal error will dilute the message in the church to such a degree as to become impotent and worthless. Likewise, practical unrighteousness carries the same damage to the church.

*Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”
(1 Corinthians 5:6-8 [ESV](#))*

Illustration: Young pastor, 29. Man in our church who had served for years in the church. He was caught in the sin of adultery. He was “old” . . . in his 40s! I thought, “*Who am I to ask him to talk with me? Who am I to bring him this correction?*”

God said, “*Well, you are his pastor. I made you his pastor.*”

I argued, “*Well, he is not going to listen to me. I am 29. I do not know him well. What is the use of going to him about this matter? I am just starting out here. I do not want to make enemies.*”

But then the Holy Spirit said, “*Ritch, I have called you to live for the glory of God. I have not called you to be popular or well-liked. I have called you to lift up my Name in my church.*” And I lost all my arguments for why I could avoid the difficult conversations.

Do you know how it turned out? Terrible. On a human level anyway. The man was angry with me. Stopped coming to church. Left his wife and family. Sent a letter from his lawyer threatening a lawsuit if we ever contacted him again.

Truth: Hard Talks done the right way may not change the person. In fact, the Hard-Talk may ignite a fire of hatred and anger against you and in the community. But when done in the Spirit, Hard Talks always glorify God. They are what God commands for the sake of His Name.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16 [ESV](#))

Application: When we set the Hard-Talk Table, we are wise to make the glory of God our chief end.

Item #6: Love-infused Clarity

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—” (Galatians 1:6 [ESV](#))

Sometimes in a desire to be gentle and humble, the message of our correction is softened to the point of being unclear. So we go through the emotional distress of asking a brother to the Hard-Talk Table, but after the conversation the brother is not even aware that he was at a Hard-Talk table.

Clarity in correction is loving. Paul sets an example for us of love-infused clarity. Yes, clarity can be used as a blunt weapon to bludgeon a hard-hearted brother. So clarity needs to be fenced with grace. But clarity and grace are not mutually exclusive.

We are not told the story of HOW Paul became aware of the specific problem in the Galatian churches. But we know that Paul is not acting on rumor. He has done his homework. He is not guessing when he confronts them. In Galatians 6, we are told to invite someone to the Hard-Talk Table when they are “caught” in a sin . . . It is really important to get our facts straight BEFORE we bring correction. We do not glorify God by false accusations or by listening to evil reports. God is just and justice requires that we consider people innocent until proven guilty. BUT once the doctrinal error or the ethical sin is confirmed, we love others with CLARITY.

Error: If we are so soft with our words that our message of correction is unclear, we have not loved our brothers and sisters well.

CONCLUSION:

God has placed His people in community with each other. The church is a spiritual family created by God for His glory.

So as members of Jesus’ church, we need each other. We need each other’s love. We need each other’s prayers. We need each other’s encouragement. We need each other’s correction.

Peter and Barnabas needed Paul to take them to the Hard-Talk Table. Are you and I better than Peter and Barnabas. We are right to be quick to hear and to benefit from brothers and sisters who are love God enough to take us to the Hard Talk Table.

We also need to be prepared to invite other brothers and sisters to the Hard-Talk Table. If you are a spiritual man or woman, it is an absolute guarantee that God will ask you to make an invitation to someone in your future. It will not be easy. Your flesh will shrink from it. But God will be glorified in it if you receive this assignment by faith.

Keeper of the Spring. There is a greater responsibility that God places upon spiritual leaders in the church for the purity of the spring. But in another sense, every member has a responsibility. In the story of the town in the Alps, the townspeople did not need to wait for the one person to clear up the pools that fed the spring. Each member of the community could have done a little! And then the little from many would have been much.

Point: If the spring is contaminated, the community dies.

SALVATION HERE.

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Item #1: God-ordained Relationship

Item #2: Family Affection/Commitment

Item #3: Grace-filled Attitude

Item #4: Cross-centered Foundation

Item #5: God-glorifying Purpose

Item #6: Love-infused Clarity