**GALATIANS:**

**“I Shot The Law, And Grace Won.”**

We’re cruising the Bible, asking the burning question, “Will the *real* God please make Himself a little more apparent and believable?”

I’m engrossed in a book by Dr. Gregory Boyd and Edward Boyd, *Letters from a Skeptic: A Son Wrestles with His Father’s Questions about Christianity*. This no-holds-barred colloquy is refreshingly riveting, like when Greg’s dad Ed writes:

“Why does God put us in a position where we have to *try* to believe in Him? Why does He toy with mankind, teasing us with evidence that’s good enough to make us uncomfortable, but never coming directly out and making Himself clear? What’s so great about ‘faith’ that He desires it above an *obvious* revelation of Himself? And when He does reveal Himself -- supposedly in the Bible -- He does so many damn bizarre things that no one who wasn’t there to *see* it can be expected to *believe* it. Yet ‘salvation’ supposedly hangs on this! Why do people have to believe things and accept stories they’d never accept under ordinary circumstances in order to be saved? This isn’t exactly fair.

“So if I want to avoid hell, I presumably have to believe that a snake talked to Eve, a virgin got pregnant by God, a whale swallowed a prophet, the Red Sea was parted, and all sorts of other crazy things. Well, if God wants me so bad, Greg, why does He make believing in Him so damn impossible? He gives an evidence here, an evidence there -- enough to get us wondering -- but then He throws in these other bizarre things which we can’t possibly be expected to take seriously! If there were *only* the evidence, or *only* the crazy stuff, I’d have no problem. But combined, it’s most aggravating!

“It seems to me that an all-powerful God could do a much better job of convincing people of His existence than any evangelist ever does, and even better than all your arguments do. Hell, just write it across the sky, nice and big:

**‘My Way or the Highway. Sincerely Yours, the Almighty.’**

“You wouldn’t have to spend an afternoon arguing history with me. I’d be on my knees! ... How can anyone be expected to believe all of this is literally ‘the Word of God’? If you read it in any other book, you wouldn’t give it a second thought!”

You might enjoy this little book’s 190 pages.

We’re flying through the 66 books of the Bible, from the Greek *biblia*, meaning “books.” It took 16 centuries for 44 men, inspired by God Himself, to write what became known in the 5th century as “the Bible,” a fairly venerable “brand name.”

Its authors would impress the Politically Correct Police with their diversity as statesmen, peasants, kings, herdsmen, fishermen, priests, tax collectors, tentmakers, educated, uneducated. Jews, Gentiles.

In this Book we see God’s loving pursuit of a basically disinterested mankind. Despite its many cultures, events and eras, written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek by authors mostly unknown to each other, the Bible has one message: **God loves you, and He’s made it possible for you to live with Him always, by dealing with your sin once and for all at the cross 2,000 years ago.**

The Old Testament contains 39 books, the NT 27. The OT opens with Creation and wraps with the Jewish nation being liberated from their 70-year captivity in Babylon, hidden from the U.N. inspection team.

The NT is a “quick read,” covering God’s actual, in-person arrival on earth in the form of Jesus Christ. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John cover his 33 years on earth, His crucifixion, His return from the grave, and His trip back into heaven. The rest of the NT chronicles the early years of the spread of the Gospel from Jerusalem to the edges of the first century world.

What *was* that Gospel? As Paul laid it out for Christ’s followers in Greece (II Cor. 5:19-21):

“God put the world square with Himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what He is doing. We’re Christ’s representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God’s work of making things right between them. We’re speaking for Christ Himself now: become friends with God; He’s already a friend with you.”

The OT has three parts: (1) *The Law* (or the *Torah*) is the first five books, written by Moses. (2) *The Prophets* consists mainly of history and prophecy. And (3) *The Hagiographa*, or “The Holy Writings” contain the rest of the OT books.

There were 400 years between the OT and NT when God was “silent,” choosing not to inspire anyone to write a book. Maybe He was shopping for a new agent.

The NT also has three divisions. (1) The historical books are the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the Acts of the Apostles. (2) The Epistles are 21 letters written by Paul, Peter, James and Jude (written not by the Beetles but by the brother of Jesus and James). And (3) the Revelation, the NT’s only book primarily devoted to prophecy.

**Paul’s letter to the GALATIANS:**

**Free at Last, Thanks to Grace.**

Paul wrote 13, maybe 14 of the NT “letters” (since authorship of the one to the Hebrews is still up for grabs). There are three groups of these letters. The first four, all from Paul, (Romans, I and II Corinthians and Galatians) address that power principle that Christ can actually dwell within man. It’s called **“Christ in you.”**

The next nine letters are also signed by Paul and deal with living in relationship with others who follow Christ. Paul calls this worldwide group of believers “the church, the Body of Christ.”

The last eight are the manual for *how* we take all these transforming God-truths and put them to practical use.

Paul (nee Saul) was born in Tarsus, an affluent, educated, trading center in today’s Turkey under Roman rule. His family was both conservative Jew and Roman, truly the best of both worlds.

As a teen Saul jetted to Jerusalem to study the Jewish religious law under Gamaliel, a celebrated rabbi. Having served in the Sanhedrin, the high court, the well-credentialed Saul became a foaming-at-the-mouth persecutor of the earliest Christians -- sort of the White House/Ken Star scenario.

Armed with Janet Reno’s court orders, he was off to Damascus to inflict more pain on the small but growing band of “Christ-ians.” In a flash he was frozen in his tracks by a Don Pardo voice (Acts 9:1:22) that asked, ‘Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?”

He replied, “Who’s speaking, **sir**?” The response from upstairs was “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city and await my further instructions.”

Sensing a career change, Saul laid low in the Arabian desert and Damascus for three years to clear his head. There, the Bible says, the resurrected Christ revealed to him -- and him alone -- the *Gospel of the Grace of God*. *This* Gospel goes like this:

Because of Christ’s sacrificial death on the cross, God’s forgiven us *all* our sins, no longer holding them against us. That clean slate’s given to all as a FREE GIFT -- *not* something we earn. It’s ours because of God’s G-R-A-C-E -- “**G**od’s **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense.”

Emerging with a new message, a new tan and a new name, Paul embarks on three major treks to take the Good News to the eastern and northern Mediterranean Rim.

45-48 A.D he rolls out several churches in Galatia in modern Turkey. Galatia comes from *Gaul*, the ancient Roman word for France. About 300 B.C. the Gauls from old France sacked Rome, then goose-stepped into northern Greece and across the Dardanelles straits into Asia Minor (now Turkey). They settled there at the invite of a local Turkish king who’d been visibly shaken by seeing them coming on CNN (*Cairo* News Network).

Unlike Arabs, Turks or Asians, Gauls were fair-skinned Western Europeans. As Julius Caesar said, “The infirmity of the Gauls is that they are fickle in their resolves, fond of change and not to be trusted.” Hey, he can’t talk about our ancestors like that, can he!

The Galatians welcome Paul’s message of forgiveness, throwing themselves into following Jesus Christ. Paul returned there twice.

But as he pens this letter to them, between 49 and 57 A.D., he’s ticked.

It seems the Galatian church has been lured from believing in salvation-by-faith-alone by the false teaching of certain Jews who said, “Yeah, Jesus is way cool. We’re Christians, too. But for you Gentiles to become Christians, you have to get circumcised like us and meet the other requirements of Moses’ Law.”

It wasn’t that the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17) were bad. The problem was -- and is -- no one can *keep* them! While teaching on earth, Jesus expanded on that impossibility. He said (Matthew 5:21-22), “You’re familiar with the command to the ancients, ‘Do not murder.’ I’m telling you that anyone who is so much as *angry* with a brother or sister is guilty of murder.”

Living here, Jesus proved that only He, the perfect God/man, could obey *all* the law. He said (Matthew 5:17), “Don’t suppose for a minute that I have come to demolish the Scriptures -- either God’s Law or the Prophets. I’m not here to demolish but to complete.” He alone was able to keep from breaking a single law.

We’ll discover in Galatians (2:16) that when we receive God’s forgiveness, He literally applies all of Christ’s righteousness to our personal account, wiping out the penalty for our sins, crediting us with Christ’s perfect keeping of the law. It’s like this. Let’s say you and Mario Andretti both have Washington driver’s licenses. He’s a better driver, but you both have the same right to get behind the wheel. In God’s eyes the Bible says, He regards anyone “in Christ” just as righteous as His Son Jesus!

The righteousness here does not mean lifestyle, i.e., always doing the right thing. It’s Christ’s righteousness, that which allows you to stand forgiven before a holy God.

These Jewish vultures of virtue had targeted all young Gentile churches. But their water was turned off when Jerusalem fell to Rome in 70 A.D. when all ties between Judaism and Christianity were severed. ‘til then, Christianity was seen as a sect of Judaism.

Paul writes this Magna Carta of Christian Liberty to the Galatians, attacking all the legalism that’s strangled the church in many places for 2,000 years. It’s a religion you may have encountered yourself, downloading to you its unwelcome guilt, condemnation and failure.

Paul’s response is, “Hey, not long ago you bought my Gospel that Christ came, died and rose again so that you might be FREE from the law. He came to LIVE *IN* YOU, not to give you an unreachable goal to strive for.” It’s the grandest theme imaginable -- the Creator of the whole darn universe wants to live His life **in** and **through** us!

Paul’s truth serum to ward off these jive-talkers from J-town is JUSTIFICATION BY **FAITH** APART FROM WORKS OF THE LAW. In the first two chapters Paul defends his authority to speak as an apostle, authenticating his message that we are saved by nothing more nor less than God’s grace. That alone gives us peace with God because Christ died to pay a debt we never could. **Let’s read ch. 1.**

The key verses of the entire book are next, underlining that the only way you and I can stand forgiven and righteous before God is because Christ died and rose for us. **Let’s read ch. 2.**

In ch. 3 Paul explains “justification by faith,” or *sole fide*, “faith alone.” Without it, salvation-by-earning-it would trump what Paul wrote to the Ephesians. **Let’s read Ephesians 2:8-9**.

That tasty paraphrase of the NT, *The Message*, translates these two verses like this: *“Saving is all (God’s) idea, and all His work. All we do is trust Him enough to let Him do it. It’s God’s gift from start to finish! We don’t play the major role. If we did, we’d probably go around bragging that we’d done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving.”*

Politicians, it seems, are forever trying to pit one class against another. But God sees all who believe in Him without regard for their denominations, religions, races or other differences. **Let’s dive into ch. 3.**

“Salvation by faith” was the bank of glaring Klieg lights that flipped on 450 years ago for a German monk named Martin Luther. He’d devoted his life to clawing his way to heaven based on the salvation-by-works model. He’d bought all the tapes on fasting, indulgences, sacraments, intercession of the saints, penances and confession. He’d done all-nighters and prayed, but --- zip inner peace!

Finally, totally bummed, Martin went to the head of his order, pleading for something that would free him from his sins. Not knowing the Bible too well himself, the old gent nevertheless gave Luther one revolutionary piece of counsel: **“Put your faith not in yourself but in the wounds of Christ.”**

He followed that thought to Romans where he read, “The righteous shall live by *faith*.” There he discovered that Jesus had *already* paid the penalty for his sin, a price too big for Luther or you or me to ever afford. Christ took our guilt to the cross so that God, His Father, could accept Jesus’ life as the forever-Sacrifice for our sins. Voila! Luther saw it -- **God accepts us because of Christ, NOT because we earn His forgiveness.**

Luther was never the same again. Nor will you and I be. **Let’s read ch. 5.**

Chapter 6 addresses the important principle of “sowing and reaping,” but that must wait for our next visit to this “Epistle of Freedom.”

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