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<http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>

Personal Study of the Bible-70
Galatians 1:4- “Christ Gave Himself Up for our Sins”

Read Galatians 1. Verses 1-10 is the introduction for the “churches of Galatia.” In verses 11-24 we have Paul’s defense of his ministry. Unlike Paul’s letter to the Thessalonians, those wonderful, truth-seeking, positive believers who merely needed more doctrine regarding Christ and eschatology, the Galatians had moved into legalism in regard to salvation (soteriology) and the Christian way of life (sanctification). Galatians is all about the Cross of Jesus Christ. Note how Paul moves right into the core of the gospel in verse 4. Then note how the rest of the chapter revolves around the gospel of grace: 6-7, how the Galatians were deserting God by embracing a “gospel” by works; 8-9, cursing on anyone who would preach a false gospel; 10-24, Paul’s defense of God’s direct personal calling on his life to preach the gospel of grace. By reading Galatians 1 several times, you should have a good overview of its content and be able to make your own outline of the chapter.

In regard to the Cross and the Gospel, I would like to go into a bit more detail on a key phrase in verses 3-4: “and the Lord Jesus Christ who *gave Himself*.” Jesus was not a helpless victim. He deliberately *gave Himself* over to God the Father for the sacrifice of the sins of the world, which necessitated *giving Himself* over to the evil and wicked men around the Cross, namely Pontius Pilate, the Romans, the Sanhedrin, and the throngs of people who cried out for His blood.

What is very interesting is how the Gospel writers juxtapose the beautiful love and grace of God with the darkness and wickedness of man, both unsaved and saved. Christ *hands Himself over* to man and in so doing actually reveals the true character of man by man’s treatment of Him. Both divine qualities and human “qualities” are revealed for what they are at the Cross. Christ hands Himself over to each and every person and leaves it up to each person to embrace Him and His grace or to reject Him and His free grace.

Let’s consider for a moment how differently an unbeliever looks at the basic historical event of the Cross of Christ. If you asked an educated unbeliever, Why did Christ die? Who was responsible for His death? he would talk about how Jesus did not die willingly, he did not hand himself over; he was killed, publically executed as a felon. Furthermore, he would say that he was killed because the doctrines he taught were thought to be dangerous, even subversive. He would point out that the Jewish leaders were incensed by what they perceived as his disrespectful attitude to the Law and by his provocative claims to be God. He would also note that the Romans heard that he was proclaiming himself King of the Jews, and so challenging the authority of Caesar. To the unbeliever Jesus appears as a revolutionary thinker and preacher and activist. So profoundly did he upset the status quo that they simply had to do away with him. In fact, both the Jews and the Roman authorities entered into an alliance with one another to shut up this preacher. In the Jewish court a theological charge of blasphemy was brought against him. In the

Roman court the charge was political, sedition. Whether his offences were seen to be primarily against God or against Caesar, the outcome was the same. He was a perceived threat to law and order—this could not be tolerated. He was to be liquidated. From the perspective of the unbelievers of his time and ours, he died as a law-breaker and a revolutionist. However, in reality He was not a *victim* of all of the small minds around Him. Rather, He *gave Himself up for our sins*.

We can learn much about the nature of God, man, and the importance of commitment to the whole truth by examining the various players which the Gospel writers display for the reader. One of the fascinating features of the Word of God is how it shines light on the sins and guilt of all parties involved in His death, and in so doing teaches us much about human fallen nature by juxtaposing it with God's marvelous matchless grace. The Cross is a grand theatre where the grace of God and the nature of man are vividly showcased.

Let's begin with the fallen nature of Pilate. The portrayal of Pontius Pilate in the Gospels tallies well with the external evidence of secular history. When the Jewish leaders brought Jesus to Pilate with the words, "We have found this man subverting our nation" and added, "and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King" (Luke 23:2), Pilate could hardly fail to take notice of such a charge.

Note the light the Gospel writers shed on the fallen nature of man when he does not stand for truth. First, Pilate was convinced of Jesus's innocence. He was obviously impressed by Jesus' virtue, like His self-control, courage, calmness, and absence of any fear. Pilate actually declared publically on *three separate occasions* that he could find no ground for charging Him; read Luke 23:4, 13-15, 22. The writers of the Gospels highlight Pilate's insistence on the innocence of Jesus along with all of his ingenious attempts to avoid having to sentence Jesus (since he believed he was innocent; he knew *the truth* about Jesus's innocence) and at the same time avoid exonerating Him (since the Jewish leaders believed he was guilty). Pilate attempts to be both just and unjust simultaneously. He agonizes as he attempts to release Jesus and pacify the Jews. Note Pilate's three evasions: First, He sent Him to Herod, hoping to transfer to him the responsibility of making decision regarding Christ. But Herod sent Him back (read Luke 23:5-12).

Secondly, he tried half-measures by scourging and torturing Him (read Luke 23:16, 22). He hoped that the crowds' blood-lust would be sated by the sight of the brutality against Him and His lacerated and bleeding back. How despicable, given the fact that Pilate *knew* He was innocent! He *knew that truth!* Consider how important it is to be oriented to the whole Truth. The reason that Pilate was so evil was because although he knew the truth, he decided that pragmatism was of greater value.

Thirdly, he tried to protest his innocence. He took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying "I am innocent of this man's blood" (read Matt. 27:24). And then, before his hands were dry, he handed Jesus over to be crucified. How could he bring himself to incur this great guilt immediately after proclaiming Christ's innocence? Luke gives us three expressions that point to Pilate's lack of virtue, his lack of orientation to truth: 1) "their shouts prevailed," 2) "Pilate decided to grant their demand," 3) and he "surrendered Jesus to their will" (read Luke 23:23-25). Pilate capitulated to *their* shouts, *their* will, all the while he was "desiring to release Jesus" (Luke 23:20), because he was "wanting to satisfy the crowd (Mark 15:15). Note again the issue of Truth before him. Truth is always the issue before every man, unbeliever and believer. If

Pilate had been open to the Truth, then the Lord, who desires all men to be saved and come to full truth (1 Tim. 2:4), would have given him the grace to see the Truth of God instantiated in the Person of Jesus Christ. The God-man, the Creator and Sustainer of all things, is standing before Pilate, but because Pilate is more oriented to expediency rather than Truth, he ended up having the God-man tortured and crucified, knowing full well that Jesus was innocent.

The crowd won over Pilate; it had more influence than the Son of God on Pilate. Why? Because they said to him, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar" (John 19:12). This clinched it. The choice was between virtue and ambition, between principle and expediency, between commitment to truth or committing a crime. He had already been in trouble with Tiberius Caesar on two or three occasions. He could not afford more trouble with Caesar. The bottom line in regard to Pilate's fallen nature is that he was a coward. And he was a coward because he would not stand up for Truth: he knew Jesus was innocent. Any person, believer or unbeliever who does not stand up for truth will always fall for the lie. The character of a person who will not stand up for truth has no place to go but cowardice.

It is easy to condemn Pilate and overlook our own equally devious behavior when we are living according to our fallen natures instead of full commitment to Truth. Anytime we do not stand up for Truth, we end up mirroring the vices of expediency and the cowardice of Pilate. Pilate does not want to deal with Jesus, so he sends Him to Herod. When we are not committed to the whole truth, total truth, to avoid personal decisions and responsibility of living the Christ-centered life, it is easy to leave the decision to somebody else: let someone else be the spiritual leader or let someone else witness for Christ. Like Pilate who tried half-measures, when we are not committed to the total truth, we too opt for half-hearted compromises to please *kosmos diabolicus*. Like Pilate who washed his hands and proclaimed his innocence, we too when we only look at slices of truth that we like, we tend to proclaim our own righteousness and loyalty all the while denying Him in our daily lives by denying certain truths that are uncomfortable.

Again, anytime we do not stand up for and fight for the whole truth, we are like expedient Pontius Pilate. It need not be this way. Galatians 1:4 not only says that Christ gave Himself up for our sins, but that He came to rescue us from the present evil age, which means He came to give us the power and courage to love, grow, be committed, and be transformed by the whole truth about God and the things of God. God's plan for your life and mine is not cowardice, half-heartedness, and self-proclaimed righteousness, which are simply manifestations of lack of desire for and commitment to the whole truth.

Lest you think that failure to be absolutely committed to Truth is just a problem with Pilate, Judas, the Sanhedrin, and the first century Christians (who did *not* even attempt to dissuade the blood thirsty crowds who were crying out "crucify Him"), consider the lack of commitment to the whole truth in Galatians 1: the Galatians had deserted God by embracing a false gospel and Paul formerly was persecuting the church because of His suppression of Truth in certain passages in the Old Testament regarding the Messiah. Even the Apostle Peter and Barnabus, due to Pilate-like expediency, failed to fight for the whole truth of the Gospel (read Galatians 2:11-14), and as Paul puts it "were not straightforward about the *truth* of the gospel" (14). The same Apostle Peter, that Christ-like Peter, who in Acts so magnificently and so boldly proclaimed the Truth of the Gospel (read Acts 2:22-36), became a coward like Pilate because he

went with the way of expediency instead of the way of truth (Gal. 2:11-14). Those who will not stand up for Truth as a way of life will end up with living a lie as a way of life. May this never be the case for me or for you or your family. May our lives continue to be ever more characterized by a love and commitment to the whole truth about God and the things of God above all else. God forbid that we live a life like Pilate, especially when we know better and have all of the marvelous grace *potentials* of being men and women of Truth, of God, in every area of our lives. Why fake it when *all* of us believers have been offered the Real Thing?

In 'Ekyeh,

Pastor Don Hargrove