

Introduction

How can you be reconciled to God? Would you say, “I need to be a better person or treat others better? Would you say I need to be baptized or get my family in church?

We should do all of those things, *but do they contribute to us knowing God?* No. *What about your faith? Don't you at least contribute your faith to your relationship with God?* No. Faith is a work of God **and** faith is an acknowledgement that I **cannot** contribute anything.

Context

Galatians is written to a group of churches that were struggling with false teaching about the gospel. Galatians corrects the beliefs that works are necessary for salvation, that your heritage has any role in your salvation, and that you maintain your covenant relationship with God through works.

The letter begins with a defense of Paul's apostleship, which is ultimately a defense of the authority of this book as Scripture, God's word. **Scripture is the word of God, not men.**

Main idea

The greeting also introduces the gospel. As we read these verses, ask yourself, *How can I be reconciled to God?* For some, it may be hard to accept that you come to God empty-handed. He alone does the work of redemption. For others, this will be a great relief that you contribute nothing to your redemption. After all, you realize that you **cannot** contribute anything to your redemption. I hope you will see as we read these verses that **Redemption is a work of God, not men.**

Grace Alone

Most of the New Testament letters begin with a similar greeting that emphasizes grace, mercy, and peace from God. [Galatians 1:3](#) “3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,”

Peace

What peace does this verse describe? The gospel is a message of **reconciliation**. Our sin is a rebellion against God and a rejection of Him. We are separated from God in our sin. Although we were God's enemies through sin, we can have peace with God through the gospel.

Notice that this peace is “... from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” ([Gal 1:3](#)).

Reconciliation is a work of God, not man. [Colossians 1:19-20](#) “19 For in him [Christ] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him [Christ] to **reconcile to himself** all

things, whether on earth or in heaven, making **peace** by the blood of his cross.” We do not reconcile to God; God reconciles us to Himself. Peace comes from God.

Grace

What is grace? The idea of grace is that our redemption is a **gift** from God. Grace means that **we receive what we do not earn**. We are redeemed by grace alone. [Romans 3:24](#) “24 [all] are justified by his **grace** as a **gift**, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,”

One of the false teachings that is addressed in Galatians is that our **works** contribute to our redemption or that we please God by our works. This teaching is prominent today as well. For example, the **Latter-Day Saints** (Mormons) teach that God contributes grace and we contribute works. The Book of Mormon states, “It is by grace that we are saved, **after all we can do**” (2 Nephi 25:23). That directly contrasts with Scripture that says, “8 For by **grace** you have been saved through faith. And this is **not your own doing**; it is the gift of God, 9 **not a result of works**, so that no one may boast” ([Eph 2:8-9](#)).

Grace for salvation and works for salvation cannot coexist. Remember that grace is **receiving what you do not earn**. [Romans 4:4](#) “4 Now to the one who works, his wages are **not** counted as a **gift** but as his **due**.” That is, **if our works contribute to our redemption, then grace does not contribute**. [Romans 11:6](#) “6 But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” Anyone who says that we are saved by grace “after all we can do” destroys God’s grace.

For our sins

We contribute only one thing to our relationship with God. [Galatians 1:4](#) “4 who [Christ] gave himself for our **sins** ...” The only thing I contribute in my relationship with God is **my sin**. I don’t contribute to my **reconciliation** with God; I contribute to my **separation** from God.

This is true for all of us. [Romans 3:23](#) states “23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” We should not view sin the way we view speeding. We tend to think that we are not speeding as long as we are going the same speed or slower than everyone else. That is **not** how God views sin. God, not other people, determine what is righteous and what is sin. God, not other people, judges me for my sin.

Synthesis

*What do **we** contribute to our redemption?* The grace of God and peace with God are **from God**. I contribute only my **sin**. **Redemption is a work of God, not me**.

Do you desire peace with God? I pray you do. If so, know that He is a gracious God. He redeems those who come to Him empty-handed, with nothing to offer but the sin that separated us. God’s grace is greater than **all your sin**.

In Christ alone

*In what way does God give us grace and peace? How are we reconciled to God? What means of grace redeems us? **God redeems us through Jesus's death and resurrection.** [Galatians 1:4](#) "4 who [Jesus] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,"*

Gave Himself

The **cost of our redemption**, the means of God's grace to us, the only means of peace with God ... is that Jesus "gave Himself." *What does it mean that Jesus "gave Himself?"* Jesus said "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" ([Mark 10:45](#)). Jesus gave Himself by **dying** for us.

Why was death necessary for redemption? After God created Adam, he warned him that the outcome of sin would be death ([Gen 2:17](#)). We all face the same consequence of sin. [Romans 6:23](#) says "23 For the wages of sin is death ..." Death is the natural consequence of sin. God gives life and our sin separates us from God.

Since death is the consequence of sin, death is a **necessary aspect of redemption** from sin. [Hebrews 9:22](#) "... without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins." If I have **earned** death by my sin, then the price of my redemption is death.

Notice what [Galatians 1:1](#) adds: "1 Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who **raised him from the dead.**" Jesus died for our sins, but He arose. His resurrection demonstrates His authority over life and death. In Him we have eternal life.

*Why was **Jesus's** death necessary for redemption?* Jesus is the only one who could die to atone for your sin for two reasons. First, only **Jesus was sinless** ([Heb 4:15](#); [1 Pet 2:22](#); [1 John 3:5](#)). *How many of you would willingly die so that someone else (e.g., your children) would be spared from eternal condemnation?* However, such an idea is impossible. *What could I possibly offer to redeem someone else?* I can only offer my own sin. Jesus is the only one who could atone for my sins, because only Jesus is sinless.

Second, only Jesus can redeem because **Jesus is both God and man**. Jesus is eternally God. He became a man so that He would die for our sins. Scripture teaches that no person can bear the guilt of another person's sins ([Exod 32:30-33](#); [Ezek 18:4, 20](#)). **Only God can bear our guilt** ([Exod 32:32](#); [Num 14:19](#)). Only Jesus, the eternal God, the sinless man, could die for our sins.

Deliverance

What does Jesus's death accomplish for you? [Galatians 1:4](#) "who [Jesus] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age ..." **Jesus died to deliver us, to set us free.**

What is “this present evil age?” Scripture associates the prevalence of sin in the world with the world’s enslavement to sin and Satan. [1 John 5:19](#) “19 We know that ... the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.”

When we sin, we don’t tend to think of that as slavery. We tend to think of it as **freedom**. That is how **Adam and Eve** considered the temptation from Satan; they viewed it as freedom. Satan questioned God’s warning, he challenged that there would be any consequences to their sin, and he promised they would be like God. They chose personal freedom over submission to God.

But is sin really freedom? Scripture denies that sin is freedom. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” ([John 8:34](#)). Similarly, Peter wrote, “They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved” ([2 Pet 2:19](#)).

How often have you thought ... “I wish I could control my tongue; I wish I could control my anger; I wish I could control my eyes.” **Sin is slavery**. But thanks be to Christ, who gave Himself to set us free ([Rom 7:24-25](#); [Gal 4:4-7](#)).

Synthesis

*What does **God** contribute to our redemption?* Jesus, the eternal God, died to bear the guilt of the sins of God’s people. By His death and resurrection, Jesus sets us free from sin and death. **Redemption is a work of Christ, not men.**

Reflect for a moment on Jesus’s atoning death in light of your redemption. If your relationship with God doesn’t **drive** you to the praise of God’s grace, then you either misunderstand how **lost** you are or how great the **price** of your redemption. Listen to how Paul reflected on how lost he was without Christ. [Romans 7:24–25](#) “24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord ...”

For God’s glory alone

A question we rarely ask is **why** did Jesus die to redeem us from our sins? We have already discussed the reason from **our perspective**. *But why would God, who owes us nothing but judgment, plan before creation to redeem us through Christ?* There is a danger of viewing the gospel from a man-centered perspective. Although **we** benefit from the gospel, **the gospel is for God’s glory**.

God's will

Notice that **the plan of redemption is God's plan**. [Galatians 1:4](#) "4 who [Jesus] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father," The gospel is **God's will for redemption**.

The gospel is the **only** plan for redemption. This is an important teaching in Galatians. [Galatians 1:6-10](#) explains that there is no other gospel than the gospel of Jesus. Yet, people within the churches of Galatia were distorting the gospel. Relying on works is not the gospel. Relying on being from Israel is not the gospel.

Have you heard the slogan, "all paths lead to God?" This is called **Pluralism** and is common in our culture. Pluralism claims that every form of pursuing God is valid; that is, whether you pursue God through Christ, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, etc., all forms of faith reconcile you to God.

Scripture rejects this view. The only way to know God is through Christ. Jesus said, "...I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father **except through me**" ([John 14:6](#)). **Keith Green** once described his years of searching for faith. He said what led him to Christ was that as he examined various religions, they all pointed to Christ as a great teacher, prophet, or example. In contrast, Jesus did not point to other religions or religious teachers. Jesus said He was the **only** way to God. The gospel is the **only** plan for redemption.

God's glory

Notice the conclusion of the gospel in [Galatians 1:5](#) "5 to whom [God] be the glory forever and ever. Amen." **The goal of the gospel is God's glory**.

This does not mean that the gospel is unconcerned with people. Jesus died for sins because **He loves the church**. [Galatians 2:20](#) "... the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who **loved** me and **gave** himself for me." [Ephesians 5:25](#) "... Christ **loved** the church and **gave** himself up for her," [Romans 5:8](#) "8 but God shows his **love** for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ **died** for us." Jesus's death for our sins is an expression of God's love for us.

Ultimately, however, the **purpose of the gospel is to bring glory to God**. [Ephesians 1:3-14](#) describes the gospel thoroughly, emphasizing the roles of the Father, Son, and Spirit in salvation. Listen to the conclusion that is repeated throughout that passage. [Ephesians 1:6](#) "6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved." [Ephesians 1:12](#) "12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory." [Ephesians 1:14](#) "14 who [Holy Spirit] is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." **The purpose of the gospel is for the praise of God's glory**.

Victoria Osteen, Joel Osteen's wife, once said, "When you worship Him [God], you're not doing it for God really. You're doing it for yourself, because that's what makes God happy." One of the great dangers in the modern church is a self-centered gospel. **We worship God because He is worthy.** *Would you want the gospel if it brought great loss? What if it cost your family and friends? What if it cost your life? What if it cost your ambitions and goals? **Would you devote yourself to Christ if the only thing you gained was Christ?***

Paul wrote the letter of Philippians from prison, awaiting possible execution (I think he **was** executed). He wrote, "7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss **for the sake of Christ.** 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of **knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.** For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may **gain Christ**" ([Phil 3:7-8](#)). Genuine faith in the gospel is **Christ-centered, not self-centered.** **If Christ is the only thing you gain from faith in Him, you have gained everything worth gaining.**

Synthesis

Why does God reconcile you to Himself? God reconciles us to Himself because **he loves us.** God reconciles us to Himself because it is **His will** and it **brings Him glory.**

Not every profession of faith in Jesus is genuine faith. Scripture frequently warns that our faith must be tested and we must examine if our faith is genuine. **Genuine faith is a work of the Holy Spirit that leads us to believe Jesus, to love Him, and devote ourselves to Him.** Faith in the gospel is not merely a response to a gift; it is a response to Christ.

Conclusion

Martin Luther

Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk who wrestled with reconciling his own sinfulness with the righteousness of God. He wrote about his hatred of the righteousness of God because he feared God's wrath against his sin.

Many people today share Luther's struggle. If God is righteous and I am sinful, then I should rightly fear God's wrath. For that reason, many today choose to dismiss God's justice and wrath, claiming that it contradicts God's love.

Martin Luther had a breakthrough of understanding his relationship with God as he studied the righteousness of God in [Romans 1:17](#). He realized that in his contemplation of God's righteousness and his own sinfulness, he had misunderstood God's grace. He wrote, "The righteousness of God is that righteousness by which God graciously justifies us through faith in Jesus" (*Preface to the Latin Writings*).

Reflection

How can you be reconciled to God? Do not offer God your works; they contribute nothing to your redemption. Do not offer God your heritage; it contributes nothing. **Redemption is by grace alone.** I contribute only my sin. **Redemption is in Christ alone.** Jesus delivers me from sin and death by His atoning death. **Redemption is for God's glory alone.** The gospel is God's plan for God's glory.

Closing Scripture: [Galatians 4:3-5](#) “3 ... we were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. 4 But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”