

Galatians 1:1-10

The Apostle Paul is seriously upset. Churches in the Roman province of Galatia that he had worked very hard and even risked his life to plant were now falling for a false gospel – one that required them to keep Jewish customs and rituals. He is writing to them to set the record straight. They need to stick to the truth of the gospel and not let anything, not even these seemingly biblical elements, cause them to depart from it, add to it, or modify it in any way.

The gospel of Jesus Christ is the truth and the truth matters. We cannot change the truth without turning it into falsehood. The gospel cannot be added to or modified in any way at all without the most horrible consequences for the teachers and those being taught. Nothing short of the difference between heaven and hell, people being saved and people being lost, is at stake.

- I. The Message of Galatians 1:1-5
- II. The Reason for Galatians 1:6-10

The gospel is the truth which saves us. We need to know it, believe it, and never depart from it.

- I. The Message of Galatians 1:1-5

A. This introduction is not simply a bunch of nice words; it's not a simple greeting: "Hey guys, it's me Paul. What's up?" Paul is actually setting up the two main topics of his letter in these first few lines. They are:

- 1. Paul's Apostolic Authority
- 2. Paul's Apostolic Message

- B. Paul's Apostolic Authority 1:1-2

- 1. Paul was commissioned by God to preach this specific message.

1 Tim 2:4-7 NKJV ⁴ [God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

⁵For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, ⁷for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle—I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying—a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

- 2. Peter, an apostle if ever there was one, says that in Paul's epistles there are:

2 Peter 3:16 NKJV ... some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, **as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.**

So Paul's letters are Scripture according to Peter – just like the writings of the other apostles.

- 3. Why is this important? Because the apostles speak with the authority of God.

1 Cor 2:13 NKJV These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

- Application: What place do the Scriptures have in our hearts and minds? Do we grasp the fact that this is God speaking to us – the Lord Himself? If you received a vision like Paul did on the road to Damascus – or Moses did at the burning bush – do you think you would pay attention? Yet think how often we are inattentive as we approach God’s word.
- Moreover, this is why we need to familiar with the Bible’s whole story line. It’s possible to pull verses or chunks of Scripture out and make them say all kinds of things God never intended. This is how false teaching works. This is how it gains credibility in a person’s heart or within a church. If we know the Bible well enough to see how it all fits together, we will be able to spot such deception.

The message of the gospel arises perfectly and naturally from the message of the Bible as a whole. The gospel is the truth which saves us. We need to know it and believe it.

C. Paul’s Apostolic Message 1:3-5

1. This is the truth which had been lost by the Galatians. The supremacy of Christ and the centrality of the cross were both undermined by the lies that were finding a home within the Galatian churches.
2. The false teaching in Galatia: Paul’s opponents have come to be known as Judaizers. They were men of Jewish background who insisted that to be Christian a person must not only accept Christ but must also accept circumcision and keep the Law of Moses. They were imposing these elements of Judaism on non-Jewish people.

- Problems with this teaching:
 - It means that you and I can add to what Christ has done for us on the cross.
 - It means that human merit has a place in saving our souls.
 - If that were the case, let’s ask this: How much law keeping or ritualism is enough? How do I know which laws or which rituals are the essential ones to put me right before God? We can see where this ultimately leads.
 - I will always lack assurance for the state of my soul before God.
 - I can easily become judgmental against those who I feel are not measuring up – rather than seeing us all as sinners saved by grace, who the Bible now calls “saints”.
 - Who is responsible for the salvation of our souls from sin and eternal punishment? Jesus. He alone saves.
 - How does He save us and give us eternal life? Through His finished work on the cross and the reality of His resurrection.
- Our salvation is and always will be by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

The gospel is the truth which saves us. We need to know it and believe it. We also need to make sure we never depart from it.

II. The Reason for Galatians 1:6-10

A. The Galatians are turning away 1:6-7

1. 1:6 The Galatians are turning *from Him who called them in the grace of Christ*, that is, “from God”, to a different gospel.
2. 1:7 **Another** in this case indicates another thing of basically the same kind: “another chair at the table”, “another cup or bowl”, “another room in the same house”.
 - a) In other words, Paul is saying that this gospel which you are beginning to believe is not another gospel of the same kind. It is not a valid replacement for the gospel you received from me at the beginning.
3. **Pervert** the gospel of Christ: to turn into something else, to change. (Complete Word Study Dictionary)
4. The Galatians, in listening to the Judaizers’ version of the Gospel, were deserting the truth for a system which is “no gospel at all.” What Paul is dealing with in this letter is *essential truth*—truth which is central to the meaning of Christ’s death for us, and central to our rescue from the power of evil. If you start out with *the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth*, you cannot change it without it becoming a lie.

- Application: Confusion about the true nature of the Gospel is one of the most serious threats to Christianity in our day as well. Any “gospel” which mixes works with faith is ultimately a powerless gospel which will eternally disappoint all those who accept it.
- Concrete Example:
 - Beginning in the late 1700s and going through the 1800s several theologians, most of them in Germany, began abandoning conventional Protestant theology that focused on the death and resurrection of Christ and started moving toward a “gospel” that was really all about “being a good person” or “doing good things”. At bottom, this was a works based theology.
 - During the 1800s and going through the 1900s this kind of teaching swept through the seminaries of the Western world and ultimately captured the mainline protestant churches by capturing the hearts and minds of the ministers who filled the pulpits.
 - It’s now making its way into more conservative churches by way of the “new evangelicalism” or certain streams of the emergent church. The deception is very powerful because we are actually supposed to be good people who do good things. God knows we need to be better people who do more and better good things.
 - We must, however, stick to the supremacy of Christ, the centrality of the cross and the reality of the resurrection. Good works, in other words, pure “law-keeping” is another gospel, which is really no gospel at all.

B. The consequences of turning away 1:8-9

1. **Accursed** *anathema* given up or devoted to destruction for God's sake, ... [It denotes] estrangement from Christ and His salvation. The word does not denote punishment intended as discipline but being given over or devoted to divine condemnation. (*Complete Word Study Dictionary*)

1 Cor 16:22 NKJV *If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be **accursed**. ...*

2. Note how broad the curse is that Paul calls down. It includes other preachers, even angels, who might preach another gospel. Paul even includes himself. That's how important the purity of gospel is to him. It should be that important to us as well.

- People who deceive others by changing the gospel to include human achievement deserve eternal condemnation. This doesn't leave us a lot of wiggle room.
- It not only excludes a works-based Christianity, it excludes universalism, the belief that all will ultimately be saved regardless of what they believe. If we are not saved by the blood of Christ we are not saved at all.

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C. How we can avoid turning away. 1:10

1. A slave works to please only one person—the master. Believers concentrate all efforts on satisfying our Master—Jesus Christ.

2. The truth is, we would make a lot more people happy if we didn't proclaim a gospel that was such an exclusive message, but in that case:

a) We would not be persuading men, we would be succumbing to cultural pressure – to the spirit of the age. In 1:4 we read Christ died to save us from this present evil age.

b) We would not be pleasing God either.

Conclusions:

Paul was deeply disturbed by what was happening in the Galatian churches. They were beginning to wander from the gospel of grace while embracing a message of Jewish legalism. The concept of grace takes in both God's good will toward us and His good work within us. We cannot save ourselves and we cannot change ourselves. Rules and rituals will never produce true righteousness. Paul begins this letter by asserting his authority and attacking the foundations of the false and troubling message that the Galatians found so enticing. The rest of this letter will drive these points home more forcefully.

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