

Galatians 1:10-12 “Man Pleasers or God Pleasers?”

Why is it that people feel compelled to want everyone to like them, or follow them, to where they will often say and do things which are really not in their character? We see this a lot with politicians.

How many times have we heard those in Washington D.C. turn chameleon on us when it seems the political winds have shifted past their stated beliefs? Those who were once pro-life are now pro-abortion, or vice versa, because they perceive a majority of voters will help keep them in power if they jump into the other camp.

How many politicians who believe that more taxes will solve all of our woes, all of a sudden have had a political born-again experience as they now see that a majority of voters want their taxes reduced or want the so-called tax surplus to be returned to them?

And so, what we find in many politicians is that conviction gives way to political prostitution so that instead of serving the true interests of the people in this country, they only want to be pleasers of men to advance their own agenda of staying in power. At least this is the way I perceive much of this stuff going on in Washington. You may have a different take on all of this.

But I know of a man who never took this attitude in any political sense or theological sense after his conversion to Jesus Christ. His name is Paul. And the letter we have before us proves this as he takes a very hard line concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He knows that to alter any aspect of the gospel is to essentially create a different message which will not save people from the penalty of their sins. This is what we saw the last time we were together.

GAL 1:6-7 “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

The wrong message kills, it does not save. And so, for anyone to decide that they don't like a certain aspect of the gospel, or that they think it could use some additions, Paul pulls no punches when

explaining that his message of hope and life will not tolerate any such alterations, because God will not tolerate them.

GAL 1:8-9 “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

Keep in mind that though Paul is the one writing this letter it is the Holy Spirit of God who is inspiring and thus delivering this message both to the Galatians and us. It is Christ Himself who is sending this warning to the church and the world, not because He is being some sort of ogre, but because He loves us too much to give anything but the truth; the truth which allows us to come into a personal relationship with our God and Creator.

Paul is speaking to people who claim to be Christians. He is speaking to people who claim to be leaders in the church who are actually changing the essential message of what it means to be a Christian. And so, this warning is warranted in that if you believe and promote the wrong message you will be eternally condemned, because no other message will save.

This is common knowledge in the world with many areas of life and yet when it comes to the only way to God most people outside of the church want to change the rules. Can you imagine a flight instructor teaching his pupils who want to fly that it doesn't make any difference how you get into the air and stay there as long as you're sincere about it?

Can you imagine a brain surgeon taking the attitude that it doesn't make any difference where you cut, or what you cut, because what is really important is that you have compassion for your patient and so any surgical procedure will do?

Tell that to someone who is just about to go under anesthesia. Believe me they don't want to hear their doctor debating what end to start on. The truth is the truth, whether it's understanding the basics of flight or how the brain works.

But when it comes to our eternal destiny the truth takes on a much more infinite weight. To suggest that it doesn't make any difference if we alter the gospel is like saying it doesn't make any difference which end of a gun you use. Paul says most powerfully,

those who would change the only gospel will be eternally condemned.

Again, this is different from sharing the one true gospel with an unbeliever and then getting in their face with a self-righteous attitude as we condemn them. We condemn no one. Why? Because people condemn themselves as God is the only one who can condemn.

We certainly want to point out the consequences of rejecting Christ as Lord and Savior, but we don't want to make people feel that we're somehow better than them. Our job, as Christians is to love people with the truth in an uncompromising way.

We are to be witnesses to the fact that all men are sinners deserving God's wrath, but Christ has died and risen from the dead for sinners that they might be given life in Christ through faith alone in Him. But even in that context this truth should be delivered in love and humbleness.

This is what Paul meant when writing to the Colossians.

COL 4:5-6 "Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

Meet people where they are and bring them into the presence of Christ with the true gospel, but do it in a way which understands that everyone is different, and so we don't want to take a cookie cutter approach to sharing the gospel. Don't alter the message, just alter your approach and be real with people.

My point is that what Paul is writing in this letter to the Galatians is not meant to be taken as open season on non-believers where we pounce on them if they don't agree with us, but rather he is warning those in the church who dare to alter what Jesus Christ Himself delivered to His apostles.

Now, is Paul trying to earn brownie points here with the Judaizers in Galatia who would disagree with that position? I'll let him answer that.

GAL 1:10 "Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Under whose authority does Paul submit when it comes to the gospel, men or God? Is Paul going to allow men to intimidate him when it comes to his message of hope? No. Why? Because he loves people too much to give them a false hope and a false message.

He's not on some power trip here. In fact, he says, 'look I'm not a servant of Christ because I need some recognition from men, or that I need some position that will put me in favor with men.'

Paul understood his position before God and he was more than okay with that. If people disagreed with his stance on the gospel it didn't make any difference to him as it related to his confidence in Christ. It certainly made a difference to him that they would be lost; he grieved over such opposition to Christ. But, it didn't shake his trust in what he knew to be true.

And so, he wasn't a servant of Christ because he needed the approval of men, unlike what we see in the church today, where to advance the message of the gospel is often neglected because it doesn't sell well. I mean if we tell people that the reason Christ came into the world as Savior is because men need saving from the penalty of sin, we could conceivably cause them to flip to the next channel.

And if we do that our ratings will go down, fewer people will contribute to our ministry and we could lose it all. Hey, if we don't give people the truth in love because we're afraid they will be offended, then we have no business being in ministry or calling ourselves ministers of the gospel.

That was Paul's attitude. If he was going to be a man-pleaser, and by that he means someone who is only interested in saying what will promote himself, so that no one will be offended, then there is no reason for him to be a servant of Christ.

And by the way, even if you're not offensive in your approach to sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ, someone will always be offended. When we start telling people that there is only one way to God, someone is going to take offense. But there is no getting away from what Christ clearly said.

JOH 14:6 "Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Christ Jesus is either telling the truth or He's not. This is not open for debate. Christ is the gospel, and to change the message about

Christ is to change the unchangeable Son of God when it comes to our salvation.

Paul would not tolerate this. And he would not even consider being a servant of Christ if it meant becoming that spiritual chameleon as he was always trying to please men at the expense of changing the gospel so as not to be seen as intolerant.

I always get a kick out of people who call Christians intolerant. "You think in terms of black and white when it comes to Jesus Christ." And yet, when it comes to their beliefs, whatever belief they may hold, if you question them they then become intolerant of your perspective.

So, in our culture it's vogue to bash Christians, but don't you dare question whether or not homosexuals should be encouraged to change as they embrace Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. Don't you dare suggest that anyone with a different belief from yours is going to suffer eternal consequences.

My attitude is, 'look, I'm just the messenger. I'll try to be as loving as possible. But at some point what I'm saying is either true or not. It's either from the only true God or not. Your problem is really not with me, it's with God.'

'If you reject it, that's your choice, but that doesn't change the truth that God sent His Son into this world, which He created, to redeem men from their sin which separates people from God, and then rose bodily from the dead to secure our salvation as we embrace Him by faith.'

'Buddha couldn't and didn't do that. Mohammed couldn't and didn't do that. The gods of the New Age couldn't and can't do that. I'm giving you a message of hope and life. It's your choice. But don't think I'll be intimidated because you think it's politically incorrect to give people God's word which is eternal truth.'

Christians have learned over the years who the intolerant really are. But as I've said, the world is not really intolerant with us, they're intolerant of God. And yet, this same God says, I still love them and desire for them to come into a personal relationship with me. And so, that needs to be our attitude.

We don't want to be men pleasers, we want to be God pleasers. And if it means that to please God we must love the unlovely then we need to be willing to do that. If it means that to please God we

need to take the unadulterated message of Christ to the world in love then we need to be willing to do that.

This is Paul's heart. He was a servant of Christ. He understood that to be a Christian is synonymous with being a servant of our Lord. Unfortunately, in our world today, there has been this move toward thinking that being a Christian is being free from any responsibility toward loving and serving and obeying Christ.

This could not be further from the truth. The idea that a Christian can receive an eternal gift from God and then sit on it was as foreign to Paul as it was to Christ Himself.

MAT 5:14-16 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven."

Letting our light shine before men is not limited to some cute bumper sticker we put on our cars. I have nothing against Christian bumper stickers, but there is more to the Christian life than that. If we have light in Christ then it ought to shine on everyone around us.

And believe me there is a great deal of responsibility with possessing the light of Christ, because sometimes that light doesn't just passively burn like some forgotten bulb which illumines the front door of our homes.

Sometimes our Lord wants our light to expose the darkness; the darkness of sin in the people of this world who don't have the light of Christ, but who need it.

And we must always have the attitude that if we are light then we don't have the option to turn it on and off at our good pleasure.

EPH 5:8-11 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness..."

We have not been called to be men pleasers in either what we say or do. That doesn't mean we can't please people by being loving to them or wanting to meet their needs, or even wanting to get along, but when it comes to either promoting or not promoting the truth of the gospel when given the opportunity, that is not an option.

And for Paul, he could not even conceive of spending his life as a servant of Christ and compromising the only message that saves. The reason for this is because he knows where the message came from; the very throne of God.

GAL 1:11-12 “I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”

What Paul is saying here is that the gospel was not created in some committee room, it was not created by some zealot who decided we needed another religion. In fact, no person could have conceived of this. And the reason we know this is by what every other religion on the face of this planet has devised since the fall of man.

Do you realize that every religion that has ever been conceived has had some form of works oriented approach to God? Take all the major religions of the world, outside of true Christianity, and you will find that each of those religions demands some form of working your way to heaven as they perceive it.

Let's take Buddhism. Though classic Buddhism differs from the Western brand of Buddhism in this country the major component still involves reincarnation. The whole concept of reincarnation is that what you do in this life determines how your next life will turn out. Your good works versus your bad works determine where your future lies.

Islam. The one book which defines Islam is the Koran. “The Koran rejects the notion of redemption, [in other words, someone else paying your debt on your behalf]; salvation depends on a man's actions and attitudes. However, tauba, (which is their understanding of repentance) can quickly turn an evil man toward the virtue that will save him. So, Islam does not hold out the possibility of salvation through the work of God but invites man to accept God's guidance.” (The Spirit of Truth and the Spirit of Error 2, compiled by Steven Cory)

We could go down the list of hundreds, and more likely, thousands of different religions ranging from modern day cults like Mormonism, to Jehovah's Witnesses, to all of the popular New Age beliefs and religions like the Unity church, Christian Science, and Yoga, along with the more bizarre like witchcraft and Satanism.

Every one of these religions promote a form of good works to reach the goal of each respective religion, whether that's reaching some form of heaven or some form of utopia here on earth. There is no other religious belief in existence which places our eternal future squarely on the shoulders of a gracious God who does for us what we could not do ourselves.

This is what distinguishes Christianity from every other religion. And here we need to be careful because Christianity cannot be seen as one religion among many, any more than your shadow can be the equivalent of you.

Simply because someone claims to have a different way to God does not make it so. There is only one way to God and that is through God the Creator. To suggest that any other message can save is to be deceived. This is Paul's message. He is telling us that he received this message from the Creator.

In fact, this was the point he made to the Greeks when he visited Athens. He walked through the Areopagus and noticed all of the idols they made to their gods and then came to the idol of the unknown god and concluded that they were at least open to the possibility that there may be a god out there that they don't know of.

ACT 17:22-32 "Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands. And he is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else. From one man he made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. 'For in him we live and move and have our being.' As some of your own poets have said, 'We are his offspring.' "Therefore since we are God's offspring, we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone - an image made by man's design and skill. In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent. For he has set

a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead." When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."

Paul does not start out by trashing their gods. He is respectful of their position though he would never agree with them. But in coming alongside them he was allowed to share who this one true God and Creator is; the same God who sent His Son into the world to redeem us and proved it through His resurrection.

At this point many of them made a decision to reject the genuineness of who this one true God is. But at least they heard it. Their gods, like all of the religions in our world today, depend on our ability to appease God so as to be the least offensive to Him.

And this by the way is the reason every person is religious whether they subscribe to any formal religion or not. Everyone has a religion. The atheist is religious. Their religion is that they have no god. They believe it as they defend it and they preach it. Why do you think there is no prayer in public schools today?

A very zealous and religious atheist by the name of Madeline Murray O'Hare decided she didn't want Christian prayer in our schools and went to the U.S. Supreme Court to plead her religious beliefs. Unfortunately, our court systems chose to become legislative branches and ruled in favor of eliminating prayer from school as they declared it was unconstitutional.

This of course, places the framers of our constitution in a very precarious position since they all believed that prayer to God was not something to be taken out of any place in life including politics or the public domain. They were not all Christians, but most of them understood the need for prayer to God.

So, to suggest that changing the message of the word of God, or simply ignoring it, does not have far reaching ramifications for our world, and more importantly for Christ's church, is to be very short sighted at best and deceived at worst.

But since Paul understood that religion, be it his former religion of Judaism, or the religions of the world in the gods they created, was a man-made attempt to reach God, he had compassion on people because he met the God who reached out to him.

It was this God and Creator who gave him the message of hope and peace and reconciliation. And since there is no other God, there can be no other message of hope to be reunited to our Creator.

But notice that when Paul says in verses 11 and 12 that he didn't receive this message of hope from man he infers that he received it from God. And notice who gave him this message in verse 12.

GAL 1:12 "I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ."

This is unmistakable language which equates God with Jesus Christ. And of course, the reason for this is because Jesus Christ is fully God. Jesus Christ is the Son of God who left His throne of glory to come into this world as a man and pay the penalty due to man. And so, our Lord Jesus is none other than fully God and fully man.

And so, when Paul met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus he is saying that he met the Lord God, the only Savior of this world.

This personal revelation Paul speaks of here in our text is a revelation from the same Jesus who walked among His disciples and who, after His resurrection, told His disciples that He would return in the same way He left as He ascended back to the Father.

In other words, Paul is saying that he didn't receive this message from the other apostles. He didn't receive it from Ananias. He didn't receive it from the believers in Damascus. The reason that Paul makes this point is that the Judaizers in Galatia were trying to undermine Paul's gospel of pure grace, along with his apostleship.

They were trying to draw the distinction that the gospel they were promoting, which included the addition of the law, was a gospel the apostles in Jerusalem would have promoted, even though they didn't.

What we'll see as we go through this letter is that Paul is going to defend his position on the gospel as having received a special revelation from Christ which the apostles did in fact agree with.

But in telling these Judaizers in Galatia that he received the gospel by Jesus Christ Himself he is also showing these false teachers that the message they are promoting is a message designed by men as they were taught by other men. Paul did not submit to such teaching of mere men when it came to the gospel he teaches.

This is one of the reasons you and I can be so confident in our faith. Here was a man bent on the destruction of the church of Christ, and now after having met Him on the road to Damascus Paul does a 180 degree turn. Why? Because the other apostles convinced him into the kingdom? No. Because heaven was opened up to Paul and he saw for himself what is in store for you and me in Christ.

We're not part of some religious movement. We're not an alternative to every other religion in this world. We have the real thing. And we ought to be living it out in this world as we bring them the same message Jesus Christ personally gave to His apostles including the apostle Paul.

The apostles were there. They were faithful witnesses to the truth of who Jesus Christ is. This is not a message made up in the minds of sinful men. This is a message found in the Messiah who actually came into this world to redeem us and bring us back into a peaceful relationship with Himself.

This is something to rejoice in. This is something we need to be sharing with the world. And by God's grace we can and will as the Lord uses us to bring this message to those who are without a true hope.