

Galatians 1:6-9 - "The True Gospel has No If's, And's, or But's"

GAL 1:6-9 "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. 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!"

Of all the letters Paul has written to the churches this is the only letter where he does not have something positive to say about the particular church he's addressing at the outset, before he starts identifying some of the problems in that particular church.

Even in the last letter we studied in 1Corinthians Paul spent the bulk of his message showing the Corinthians how some in that body were immoral, self-seeking, inconsiderate of others, misusing the gifts of the Spirit, and causing other brothers and sisters to stumble because of the way they abused their liberties, and yet, despite all of this he still tries to encourage them at the beginning of the letter so as to soften his impending rebuke.

1CO 1:4-8 "I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way - in all your speaking and in all your knowledge because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

And yet, as we come to the letter he writes to the Galatians Paul immediately launches into his rebuke after his opening verses describing the grace of Jesus Christ.

There are those who have suggested that maybe Paul is being too harsh or too insensitive to the problems at Galatia and that he should have eased his way into this problem, and yet it should go without saying that though Paul is writing this letter it is the Holy Spirit who is inspiring it. These are the words of the Lord.

And so, the Lord God has seen fit to launch right into identifying the problem and then to spend the rest of the letter correcting the

wrong thinking on the part of the false teachers and those who may have adopted this new false teaching regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The other thing we need to remember is that the Galatians do not seem to be having the same kind of problems the Corinthians and others were having. This is not dealing so much with behavioral problems which can be identified and then have the people repent of them and move on in their sanctification. This is a theological problem, specifically a soteriological problem, which goes to the heart of Christianity.

If we do not have the gospel correct then we are not giving the right message to the world. And the wrong message kills. Like the message a Pharmacist gives to his clients coming in to fill a prescription, if he gives the wrong message as to how to take that medicine, or the wrong prescription, it doesn't make any difference how sincere he or his clients are, it will have devastating effects.

To think that we can take the gospel and tamper with it, or streamline it, or alter it in any way and still have God's message of grace and hope is to miss the importance of what the Son of God actually came into this world to do. We essentially take the redemptive work of Jesus Christ and tell the world it wasn't enough, or it doesn't work on its own.

Paul realizes that unless these people are arrested in their tracks immediately they may not fully understand or appreciate the seriousness of their attempts to tweak the very gospel once delivered to the apostles by Jesus Christ Himself.

We're not talking about a doctrine which addresses the mode of water baptism; do we dunk them or sprinkle them? We're not talking about a doctrine which goes into the distinctives of when and how Christ returns. Is it pre-mil., A-mil., or post mil.? None of that makes any difference if we're lost and separated from Christ because we're preaching a false gospel.

These Galatian Christians had the true gospel, they had the advantage of the apostle Paul teaching them and discipling them and yet it appears that they are abandoning all of that for something which kills and destroys. Is the correct gospel important?

Yes. It's important enough for the Holy Spirit to warn these people in no uncertain terms of the dangers of not delivering the only true

redemptive message which was secured in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone and received solely by the grace of Christ by faith alone.

The gospel plus anything is not the gospel. And by the way, when we use the word gospel we are using a term which comes from the Greek word euaggelion, which simply means good tidings, or good news.

The reason it is such good news is because the bad news is so bad. And knowing this Paul can't believe they are opting for bad news when they have a grace filled, life giving message.

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."

Paul begins by saying that he is astonished, or as some other translations put it, "I am amazed", or "I marvel".

Paul had traveled the known world of his day. He had been all over Israel, and the mid-east, he had traveled to southern Europe, together with Italy. Greece was one of his destinations. And he had pretty much seen it all. He had experienced the different customs and philosophies of a wide variety of people.

There was probably little that amazed or astonished him. And yet, when it came to these Galatian Christians, who had now begun to embrace a gospel which was false this really did amaze him. He couldn't believe someone would exchange a life-giving message with a message which lead to death.

Now it's important to keep in mind that when Paul says that he is astonished that they are so quickly deserting the one who called them by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, he doesn't mean to suggest that these people have lost their salvation. They may be in the process of quickly deserting Christ, but that's different than saying they have deserted Christ and want nothing to do with Him.

The phrase "quickly deserting" infers that they are moving in the wrong direction rather quickly, but it doesn't mean it's too late to get them back on the right path. If it were Paul would not be writing this letter.

And so, despite the fact that they may be teaching a gospel which perverts the grace of God, we still see the grace of God being extended to them to bring them around to the truth once again.

This is Paul's way of hitting these people "up-side" the head with a 2 x 4. He figures there's no gentle way of easing into this problem, so he might as well dive right in with the rebuke.

But what is even more disturbing is the way in which Paul frames this problem. Though this has to do with a theological position on soteriology, which is just the study of the salvation we have in Christ, it is much more than that.

Notice what Paul doesn't say in verse 6. He doesn't say I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the gospel of Christ. He says, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ..."

Who called them and us by the grace of Christ? The Father and the Holy Spirit. Paul is saying that they are rejecting God. "I am astonished that you are rejecting God." After all, if we reject God's message we are rejecting God. This is why when we preach the gospel of Christ to people and they reject it, they are not really rejecting you or me, they are rejecting the Lord. We're simply the messengers.

But if our message is false or altered from the original then we are no longer representing our God, we are no longer acting as His ambassadors. If an ambassador of this country decides on his or her own that he can change foreign policy, someone in authority in the United States is going to disavow that position and probably call him home if he persists.

Paul is saying that you have deserted God by acting on your own with your own message as you change, not foreign policy, but the "eternal" policy.

Now you'll notice the way Paul begins this section is to point out the problem by starting with the truth. He reminds them of the one who called them by the grace of Christ.

This whole letter is a comparison between grace and law. And so, to start by stating that it is the grace of Christ which allowed them to share in the fellowship of the Father and Holy Spirit is Paul's way of establishing what this relationship is built upon, the foundation found in the Rock, Jesus Christ.

How could anybody desert the God who extends such grace? Again, this is why Paul is amazed and astounded because he knows what it is to be an undeserving recipient of this grace found in Christ. And he wants these people to be as thankful as he is.

He then says, 'you are turning to a gospel which is really no gospel at all.' This may sound like a contradiction but it's not. In their minds they saw the addition of the law as good news. And yet, Paul reminds them that what they think is good news really isn't.

There's only one gospel, just as there is only one God. And yet, the Lord can use the kind of language which might suggest that there may be more than one God as people make the choice to go after false gods. We saw this, for example, in our study of Exodus when the Lord judged the Egyptians.

EXO 12:12 "On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn -both men and animals - and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD."

Does the Lord mean to suggest that there are real gods which are being judged? No. How can you judge gods that don't exist? But in the minds and hearts of the Egyptians they do. And because of their rebellion the one true and only God can judge their gods in the way He judges the people of Egypt.

Paul points this out when he writes to the Corinthians and their practice of eating meat sacrificed to idols, which of course would represent gods.

1CO 8:4-6 "So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many "gods" and many "lords"), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live."

One God. And in the same way, there is only one gospel, one good news as it relates to our salvation. It doesn't make any difference how many cults and groups tout their religion as being the best with the good news of their own devices. They can claim that they have the good news, but it's simply not true.

It's like someone claiming that the earth is flat, or that the moon is made of cheese. No matter how convincing they may be, it doesn't change the fact that none of those claims are true.

And so, when we run into people who have a different gospel, whether it's blatantly false or even a little false, we don't have to be intimidated. We can boldly and with confidence, in love, simply give them the truth and trust that the Holy Spirit can open their eyes.

How many times have we heard of people coming out of a false religion? I don't know about you but when I speak to Jehovah's witnesses who come to my door I expect very little results from giving them the gospel, knowing what I know about their indoctrination and determination to convert me.

And yet, there are many ex-Jehovah's witnesses who are now on fire for the one true God, who have embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and God and Savior.

What do you suppose changed their minds? Was it the eloquence of some evangelist? Was it the logic of some preacher? Or was it the Holy Spirit who used a servant of God who had the truth of the gospel and gave it faithfully? What does Paul say to the Christians in Rome?

ROM 1:16-17 "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

There is no saving power in any other message, or what some might call another gospel. We are not powerless. We have a message given to us from the Creator of this universe which saves eternally and can change the hearts of people as the Holy Spirit opens their eyes.

Sometimes we get all hung up about seeking the power. We want power for a victorious life. We want power to be able to heal the sick or power to show that God is alive and well and working in our lives. But you know what, even that power of God, in and of itself, doesn't save.

Drew, how can you say that? Isn't that type of power of God important? Absolutely. But it still doesn't change the fact that it doesn't save anyone from their sin. What if, when Peter and John,

when they reached out to the lame man and said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.", and the lame man got up walking and leaping and praising God, and they had just left it at that?

Is a physical healing in the power of the Holy Spirit the equivalent of eternal salvation? No. As mighty and wonderful as a physical healing is, it is not the power used by God unto salvation.

Did the rich man who had the beggar Lazarus eating crumbs at his table not think that a powerful miracle would change the hearts of his family as he found himself in hell after his death? He begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to his family, after he also had died and was now in heaven, to convince them that they were on the wrong path.

LUK 16:29-31 "Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' "No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' "He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Let them listen to Moses and the Prophets. What did Moses and the prophets have that would have changed them? They had the gospel. They had the good news that God saves by grace through His Messiah as they embrace the Savior by faith.

The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. Does it make any difference what gospel we're talking about? This is the issue Paul is dealing with, and he's upset that anyone would have the nerve to change it, but also for believers to receive it and embrace it.

GAL 1:7 "...Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ."

Paul doesn't identify who these people were, but it's obvious they were Jewish converts who, at least in word, professed Christ. These were Jews who had come to adopt the Jewish Messiah, Jesus. Whether they were true believers, Paul seems to call that into question.

Now the question might be raised, how can a Jew in Paul's day adopt Jesus Christ without accepting His gospel unquestioningly? Well, keep in mind the dynamics of the day. There was a lot of excitement surrounding the early Christian church. The Lord was

performing miracles, and people were being dramatically changed, especially Jews who made up the bulk of the early church.

And so, I'm sure there were those Jews who got caught up in the wave of excitement without truly embracing Jesus Christ by faith. They simply got on the wagon as it moved through town. But as with anyone who has not truly believed it's only a matter of time until the excitement can't sustain them. It's only a matter of time before they begin trying to create a faith in their own image.

And for many Jews, the image of their former religion would find itself trying to redefine this new one, as they perceived it. Since God was pleased to give us the law through Moses, how could it be wrong to bring the law to bear, along with the Messiah Moses spoke of?

Many of these Jews weren't interested in preserving the gospel Paul delivered to them, they wanted to alter it to fit their own needs, all the while bringing a message of destruction. This is why Paul is so concerned for the Galatians. He understands the ramifications. One message saves eternally, all other messages destroy and separate us from God eternally. This is a big deal.

So here's the problem. This wrong message is throwing many of these true believers into confusion. It is causing some of them to question their own salvation. It is causing some of them to wonder about some of their converts. Are they really saved since they put their faith in Christ, or do we have to go back and re-evangelize them with this other message which includes Christ plus the law?

It also raises questions about Paul's apostleship. Well, if Paul didn't give us the right message about our eternal salvation, can we trust anything else he says? Confusion would be an understatement. But if these people could question the gospel then they certainly would have been susceptible to other false teachings and they never would grow up in their faith in Christ.

Remember, Paul addressed this when writing to the Ephesians about understanding the different gifts the Holy Spirit gave certain people so that they might be built up and edified in their faith.

EPH 4:14-16 "Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the

whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Paul is saying that when we are not stable in our faith, as we chase after every wind of teaching contrary to the word of God, we stay infants and we stay tossed and we stay deceived so that the body of Christ is not unified and moving forward in the work of the gospel.

This is how the enemy works. And so, it shouldn't surprise us if the enemy attacks the very foundation of our faith and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. But if we are secure in our faith and are being built up in the word of God we are less susceptible to the attacks and the false teachings.

But here's the warning to those who are trying to pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is no mere shot over the bow.

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!”

This is serious business. And notice that Paul includes himself in this statement along with the rest of the apostles; “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 I mentioned in the introduction to this letter other translations use the terms anathema or accursed. Let him be anathema. The NIV translates that into what it actually means. Let him be eternally condemned. The idea being that you will be eternally separated from God to suffer His wrath forever since you have placed your faith in a false gospel.

What Paul means to say by this is that what the good news came to deliver us from is the bad news of suffering the wrath of God forever. And in an ironic sense the so-called good news of this different gospel actually produces the bad news it warns against.

And this is why it is more than appropriate to share the bad news with people when giving them the good news of Christ. We don't have to be afraid of chasing people off with the bad news as long as we give them the good news.

I mean look at the way the apostles gave the gospel? They never backed away from the bad news. They explained to people that the reason Jesus came into this world was because of sin which separated us from God. That's a bad thing. But they always gave the good news in love that Jesus died to pay their sin and bring them into a peaceful relationship with the Father forever.

To change this good news brings God's condemnation. Let him be anathema, or eternally condemned. You can bet that this would send a message not only to those who were changing the message, but also to those believers who were tempted to embrace it.

And again, I want to emphasize that a true believer may be deceived at times with false teaching, but when Jesus says, 'nothing can separate us from His love, and that no one can snatch His people out of His hand or the Father's hand,' He means it.

And this is why Paul writes this letter. As a shepherd of Jesus Christ, who is the Great Shepherd, Paul is doing what any shepherd should do; feed the sheep the truth in love.

Though this letter includes a rebuke in a disciplinary way it's given in love as a way to keep the sheep from going after strange doctrines which will adversely affect their lives, and to actually warn the false teachers that they are in danger of being eternally lost and to give them an opportunity to repent and truly embrace Christ alone for their salvation.

This is a letter of grace as God speaks to them through His apostle Paul. But the warning is clear that not even he or an angel of heaven should be listened to if they bring any other gospel than the one originally delivered to them by Paul.

Now Paul is speaking in hyperbole, which means he speaks in exaggeration. He knows that an angel in heaven could not possibly bring a false gospel any more than the other apostles would bring a false gospel, but in so stating it this way he drives home the point that no one, either in heaven or on earth can avoid punishment if they tamper with what Christ accomplished on the cross and secured through His resurrection.

To add the law to Christ's finished work is to add insult to Christ and the Father who sent Him into this world to redeem us from the law which cannot save.

The law saved no one, but only the grace and kindness and mercy of God can as Jesus Christ has saved us from the penalty of sin which comes from the law.

TIT 3:4-7 “But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”

It is the grace of God, not the law, that keeps us from the condemnation of God which Paul points out to those who are trying to tamper with the gospel, be it trying to work your way to heaven or trying to use part of the gospel with works to earn righteousness.

There's only one way to avoid God's condemnation.

ROM 8:1-4 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.”

It is finished. And yet, these false teachers were saying it's not finished, there's more to be added to Christ's atonement on our behalf. We'll discover what Paul has in mind as we continue in this letter next time. And we'll discover through this study how modern day teachers have changed the gospel in ways we might be tempted to accept.

We must be discerning and by the grace of God, as we study the whole counsel of His word, we will be much more discerning and less prone to error and being blown here and there by every wind of doctrine.