

NO OTHER GOSPEL!
PART 1

TEXT: GALATIANS 1:6-10

November 9, 2008

REVIEW:

I. THE GOSPEL OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM DECLARED (1:1-5)

In the opening section of this letter, we saw how Paul gives a gospel greeting. In these first five verses, he declares the gospel and makes known the issues that are at stake, namely man's salvation and God's glory.

We now come to the next section in Galatians:

II. THE GOSPEL OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM DEMANDED (1:6-10)

INTRODUCTION:

Normally, after his initial greeting, Paul would express thanks for his converts' faith and spiritual growth. Not so in Galatians!

Instead of thanksgiving and commendation, he expresses astonishment and condemnation. Why doesn't Paul express thanksgiving?

Surely the other churches to which he wrote had significant problems? The church in Corinth certainly had its share of problems.

The reason Paul expresses no thanksgiving is because in Galatians the very essence of the Gospel was at stake.

Upon receiving the shocking news of the Galatians defection from the gospel of free grace, Paul immediately responds. A sense of urgency gripped Paul.

Grave concern and doubt filled Paul's mind in regard to the Galatians standing with God.

He wavered between fear and hope as to the outcome (4:11, 20; 5:10).

At the time of his writing, the Galatians had almost been won over by the Judaizer's false teaching. Thus, in vv. 6-10, Paul announces his reason (i.e., the occasion) for writing to the Galatians, specifically the Galatians desertion of the gospel and his desire to call them back.

In vv. 6-10, Paul adamantly insists upon the exclusive claims of the gospel. He argues that unless the absolute sufficiency of Christ and the full significance of His atoning work are kept central, there is no gospel or right standing with a holy God.

Therefore, Paul condemns with arresting language anyone who does not teach that Christ is sufficient and that His atoning work (particularly, the cross and resurrection) is the sole ground of acceptance before God.

Twice (vv. 8-9), Paul pronounces a curse on anyone who supplements Christ and His atoning work with their own good works (i.e., circumcision; obedience to the Mosaic law).

As we will come to see, distorting the gospel is no small thing or trivial matter of secondary importance.

Having then declared the gospel in germinate form (vv. 1-5) and being zealous for the glory of God (v. 5), Paul immediately plunges into the main subject of his letter.

In Galatians 1:6-10, he gives four responses in regard to the Galatians defection from the gospel, thereby demanding that there is no other gospel than the one he had initially preached to the Galatians (v. 8) and they had previously received (v. 9).

The outline of vv. 6-10 is as follows:

- I. PAUL'S DUMBFOUNDMENT AT THE GALATIANS DESERTION FROM THE GOSPEL, VV. 6-7A
- II. PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF THE FALSE TEACHERS' DISTORTION OF THE GOSPEL, V. 7B
- III. PAUL'S DAMNATION OF THE DISSEMINATORS OF A DIFFERENT GOSPEL, VV. 8-9
- IV. PAUL'S DISMISSAL OF HIS DISSONANT DEVOTION TO THE GOSPEL, V. 10.

LESSON:

We will begin by focusing our attention on v. 6.

- I. PAUL'S DUMBFOUNDMENT AT THE GALATIANS DESERTION FROM THE GOSPEL, VV. 6-7A

In order to have a better understanding of Paul's astonishment, it is helpful to read Acts 13-14.

In Acts 13-14, Luke records how God greatly blessed the gospel ministry of Paul and Barnabas in the cities of South Galatia.

In spite of the strong opposition (e.g., Acts 14:19- Paul was stoned and left for dead!), God greatly blessed the gospel work of Paul and Barnabas.

A large number of Jews and Gentiles came to faith in Christ (Acts 14:1), great miracles took place (Acts 14:3) and churches were established throughout the region (Acts 14:23).

However, soon after these great successes, Paul gets word that the Galatian churches were on the verge of deserting the gospel.

In light of such a great revival of the gospel, Paul's first response to the Galatians is one of utter amazement (cf., 1:6; 3:1; 5:7).

A. PAUL'S DUMBFOUNDMENT STATED, V. 6A

Paul begins v. 6 with the verb, "I am astonished," (Θαυμάζω).

The word, "astonished," is an arresting word, which means to wonder at, to marvel, be astounded, bewildered or dumbfounded (to make somebody temporarily speechless with astonishment).

You can't read this as, "Oh, what a surprise," like the response one has to an unexpected visit from an in-law! Rather, Paul is saying, "What you are doing is so incredibly shocking, it defies belief!"

In Matthew 8:27, Matthew uses this word (Θαυμάζω) to describe the disciples' response to Jesus when he calmed the storm on the Sea of Galilee (Matt. 8:27).

In Matthew 27:14, Matthew uses it in reference to Pilate when Jesus stood before him and offered no answers in response to his accusers.

In Luke 24:12, Luke reports that Peter, when he ran into Christ's empty tomb and saw His linen cloths lying by themselves, "...went home *marveling* at what had happened," (emphasis mine).

Like the disciples in the boat (Matt. 8:27), like Pilate before Jesus (Matt. 27:14) and like Peter at the empty tomb (Lk. 24:12), Paul was at a loss for words at the Galatians' defection.

Paul is absolutely horrified. He feels the desertion of the Galatians deep in his soul. He could not comprehend how quickly they turned from the true gospel and accepted a false gospel.

It is instructive to note that lurking beneath his astonishment is a gracious rebuke. Paul's language is not only arresting but it is also at the same time mild.

Regarding the word, "astonished," Alford writes,

“...in this sense is a word of mildness, inasmuch as it imports that better things were expected of them,- and of condescension, as letting down the writer to the level of his readers and even challenging explanation from them. Still, like many other such mild words, it carries to the guilty conscience even sharper rebuke than a harsher one would,” (*The Greek Testament*, vol. 3, “Galatians,” p. 4).

In a similar manner, Luther notes,

“Considering the vehemence of Paul in this epistle, this is a very mild and tender word of rebuke. Forasmuch as his purpose is to raise up them that are fallen, and with fatherly care to call them back again from their errors to the purity of the gospel, he leaveth rough and sharp words in the first entrance, and most gently and mildly he speaketh unto them. For seeing he went about to heal them that were wounded, it was not meet that he should now further vex their green wound, by laying it to a sharp and fretting plaister. Therefore of all the mildest words, he could not have chosen one more fit than this, “I marvel,” whereby he signifieth that it grieved him, and also displeased him, that they had so soon fallen away from,” (*Galatians*, pp. 18-19).

Paul’s gracious yet firm rebuke offers instructive insight into how pastors as well as church members should deal with sheep who waiver versus wolves who distort the gospel (cf., Gal. 6:1-2)! Paul offers a gracious rebuke to the Galatians (v. 6) but twice condemns the Judaizers (vv. 8-9).

Paul’s dumbfoundment was two-fold. First, Paul marveled at the Galatians desertion from God (v. 6b). Second, he marveled at their devotion to a different gospel (v. 6c).

B. PAUL’S DUMBFOUNDMENT UNFOLDED, V. 6B, C

1. THE GALATIANS DESERTION FROM GOD, V. 6B

A. THE CHARACTER OF THE DESERTION

First, note how Paul characterizes the Galatian’s desertion. The word, “desertion” is a strong word. It literally means, “to bring to or set in another place,” (*TDNT*, vol. 8, pp. 161-162). So, for example, it is used in Hebrews 11:5 to speak of the translation of Enoch from earth to heaven.

This word also meant, “to transfer one’s allegiance,” (cf. Stott, *Galatians, BST*, p. 21).

Thus, Phillips, in his paraphrase, writes, “I am amazed that you have so quickly *transferred your allegiance* from him who called you...” (emphasis mine).

The word came to be used in a political sense to refer to political traitors, those who changed their allegiance from one country to another. It was also used to speak of a military traitor, one who deserts sides in an armed conflict (cf. George, *Galatians*, p. 91; Wuest, *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 35).

Most Americans recall the famous American Revolutionary War general, Benedict Arnold. Arnold originally fought for the American Continental Army, but during the war he switched sides to the British Army. As a result, his name became a slogan for treason in the United States.

And so, Paul, by using this word characterizes the Galatians as spiritual Benedict Arnolds because they had transferred their allegiance from the one who had called them. With arresting language, Paul accuses the Galatians of being guilty of cosmic spiritual treason! He characterizes them as spiritual turncoats!

Paul's astonishment was further increased at how "quickly" the Galatians had switched their allegiance.

B. THE MANNER OF THE DESERTION

What did Paul mean by "quickly." Several ideas have been offered.

For example, "quickly" may have *the idea of time*, meaning, "so soon after your conversion," or "so soon after the arrival of the false teachers," "or so soon after Paul's departure."

Or, it may have *the idea of manner*, meaning, "so readily," thus indicating Paul's astonishment over how readily the Galatians were to desert the gospel (cf. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 75; Vos, *Galatians*, pp. 24-25; Hogg/Vine, *Galatians*, pp. 27-28).

Paul may have intended both ideas. So the idea may be that Paul is astonished at how "readily" the Galatians listened to and accepted a false gospel. As a result, they "quickly" and came under the influence of the Judaizer's false gospel soon after his departure.

The crucial point to note is not so much whether Paul had specifically in mind the idea of time or manner. The crucial point to take careful notice of is the sobering reminder of how quickly a revival of the gospel can be quenched. Martin Luther observes,

"That work which is built up of long labour, may be overthrown in a night. A man may labour half a score of years to build up some little Church to be rightly ordered, and when it is so ordered, there creepeth in some malbrain, yea, a very unlearned idiot, and he in one moment overthroweth all. Even so it befell Paul, the elect vessel of Christ. He had won the Churches of Galatia with great care and travail, which the false apostles, a short time after his departure, overthrew, as this, and other of his epistles do witness. So great is the weakness and wretchedness of the present life;

and we so walk in the midst of satan's snares, that one fantastical head may destroy, and utterly overthrow, in a short space, all that which many true ministers, have builded up in years before. This we learn at this day by experience, to great grief, and yet we cannot remedy this enormity," (*Galatians*, p. 19).

To make matters even worse, Paul marvels over the fact that the Galatians offered little if any significant resistance to the Judaizer's false gospel.

One could literally read v. 6 as, "I am astonished that you are *in the process of removing yourselves...*," (emphasis mine)!

To be sure, the Judaizers had confused and weakened the Galatians faith and were no doubt blameworthy. But, Paul says the Galatians were, literally, "removing themselves" from the sphere of grace and freedom to cursing and bondage.

The Galatians were guilty and responsible for their act of treason. They willingly and readily removed themselves from the gospel. Such betrayal was absolutely unthinkable to Paul.

Though their defection was not yet complete they were well on their way (Note: The present tense of the verb, *deserting* (μετατίθεσθε) indicates that at the time of Paul's writing the Galatians' defection was in progress rather than complete, cf., Wuest, vol. 1, p. 35).

Therefore, Paul is writing in order to call the Galatian churches to repentance and bring them back in step with the truth of the gospel (Gal. 2:5, 14).

This raises a very important question.

To whom or what were the Galatians in the process of deserting?

C. THE SUBSTANCE OF THE DESERTION

Here in v. 6 Paul, for the first time, begins to reveal the real radical nature of the sin of the Galatians (i.e., legalism).

In v. 6, we begin to more fully understand the absence of Paul's thanksgiving, the reason for his astonishment and strong words of condemnation.

The most dumbfounding fact concerning the Galatians treasonous actions was not their switching of allegiance from Paul to the Judaizers and their false gospel. Rather, Paul's astonishment was over the fact that the Galatians were turning against God!

Note carefully the connection Paul makes in v. 6 between God (i.e., a person, "...Him who called you") and the gospel (i.e., doctrine, "a different gospel").

There is some debate as to whether Paul has in mind Christ or God the Father.

Luther favored Christ and thus writes,

"I embrace the former, for even as Paul, a little before made Christ the Redeemer, also the giver of grace and peace, equally with God the Father, so we should make Him here also the caller in grace, for Paul's purpose is to beat into our minds the benefit of Christ, by whom we come unto the Father," (*Galatians*, p. 20).

Whether the reference is specifically the Father or Son, in the end, to desert the gospel is to desert both.

Moreover, the critical point to note is this: *It is impossible to desert the gospel without deserting God as well.*

The Galatians were not just deserting a doctrine (i.e., the gospel).

Rather, by deserting the gospel, Paul says they were in the process of deserting "Him who called you in the grace of Christ!"

To be sure, no one is saved by doctrine. However, many are damned by false doctrine! It is customary for some Christian leaders and churches to downplay the importance and necessity of sound doctrine. This is certainly naïve at best and truly damning at worst.

The importance of sound doctrine is easily illustrated by the sin of gossip. No one enjoys being the victim of malicious gossip. Why? The reason is because gossip is simply false doctrine concerning a person's character and actions. In the same way, false doctrine concerning God and His saving work misrepresents His character and saving actions to bring out salvation.

This then is why we must insist on getting the gospel right! (use Sproul, p. 9-10). In his book, *Getting the Gospel Right*, R.C. Sproul, calls for faithfulness in preserving and defending the truth of the gospel. Though his words are targeted specifically to the issue of unity, they are quite applicable,

"All who embrace the gospel and love its content are visited by a divine mandate to preserve that unity and to defend it together. The gospel is our hope and our life, the most excellent and sweet truth that we have. Beside it lesser theological differences pale into insignificance. In the gospel we experience the power of God unto salvation and hear not only "good news," but the best of all possible news. This unity is so priceless that it is worth contending, fighting, and dying for. It is a family matter for the

people of God who have been adopted into the Father's house and who are loyal to the Son, who is our Elder Brother.

The truth of the gospel must be maintained for Christ's sake and for our own. Indeed it is our eternal link to Christ and the means through which we become his in the first place. In the gospel we meet the one who is our only hope in life and death, and by the gospel we acquire a hope that will never leave us ashamed," (pp. 9-10).

Distorting the gospel is no small thing. The vital doctrines of the gospel are not trivial matters of secondary importance. For, to err regarding church organization, spiritual gifts or end-time events is one thing. But, to err regarding the gospel is to cut one's self off from God!

We must recognize that satan's primary goal is to distort and undermine the gospel.

Paul, in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, writes

“³...if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. ⁴
In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

John Newton, preaching to his congregation warned,

“The doctrine of Jesus Christ, and of Him crucified, which St. Paul preached, and in which he glorified, is the pillar and ground of truth, the rock upon which the church is built, and against which the gates of hell shall never prevail (1 Cor. 2:2; Gal. 6:14; 1 Tim. 3:15; Matt. 16:18). Mistakes in this point are fundamental, dangerous, and, if persisted in, destructive; for, as such a knowledge of God as is connected with his favour and communion is eternal life, so none can come to the Father but by the Son, (John 17:3; 14:6) nor can any know Him but those to whom the Son will reveal Him (Matt. 11:27).

On this account Satan's great endeavour (and on his success herein the strength of his kingdom depends), is to darken and pervert the minds of men, lest they should acknowledge and understand what the Scripture declares of his person, characters, and offices, as well knowing, that if these are set aside, whatever else is left of religion will be utterly unavailing,” (John Newton, *The Works of John Newton*, vol. 3, “Of the Heresies propagated by false Teachers in the Apostles' Days,” p. 276.)

It must be emphasized, that deserting the gospel is to cut oneself off from the God who calls in the grace of Christ.

CONCLUSION:

In view of Paul's arresting words to the Galatians, how should we respond?

We must first recognize and take heed at how prone we are to desert the gospel.

Ebenezer Erskine once stated,

“Indeed, the generality of men that are trained up in a Protestant country will tell you, that they do not expect to be justified by their own righteousness, but by the righteousness of Christ. But alas! How few are there that do really and actually submit unto this righteousness. *There is a cursed bias in the heart of man to lean to something in himself.* Is not this the language of thy heart many times? O! If I had such a frame, such a melting of heart, such love, such a degree of humility and obedience, then I think God would accept of me, and love me on that account. But, Sirs, let me tell you, it is not on account of anything wrought in you, or done by you, but only on the account of the doing and dying of the Son of God,” (*Gospel Truth*, p. 264; emphasis mine).

To not pass over quickly, Erskine's words, “*There is a cursed bias in the heart of man to lean to something in himself.*”

Paul's words to the Galatians are a strong reminder at just how vulnerable and susceptible we are to removing ourselves from the gospel and leaning to something in ourselves.

This tendency resides not only with young believers (as was probably the case with the Galatians) but also with all believers.

This is why Paul exhorts Timothy to, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim. 4:16).

In Mark 13:5, Jesus warns, “Watch out that no one leads you astray.” In 2 John 8, John similarly warns, “Watch yourselves, so that you may not lose what we have worked for, but may win a full reward.”

The gospel message was the cornerstone of the Reformation. Yet, it was soon lost after the Reformation.

Luther, in his commentary on Galatians warns,

“The church is a tender plant. It must be watched. People hear a couple of sermons, scan a few pages of Holy Writ, and think they know it all. They are bold because they have never gone through any trials of faith. Void of

the Holy Spirit, they teach what they please as long as it sounds good to the common people who are ever ready to join something new.

We have to watch out for the devil lest he sow tares among the wheat while we sleep. No sooner had Paul turned his back on the churches of Galatia, than the false apostles went to work. Therefore, let us watch over ourselves and over the whole church,” (p. 21).

The task of each successive generation is to recover, proclaim, guard and pass on the gospel! And this task begins with each of us individually.

Therefore, take a moment and consider carefully this question, How well do you know the gospel? If someone were to ask you, “What is the gospel?,” how would you answer? How much does the gospel influence the way you live your daily life? Or, perhaps more convicting, does the gospel influence how you live your daily life? If not, why?

How often do you seek to educate yourself in the multifaceted truths of the Gospel? When did you last read a book on the Incarnation, the cross, resurrection or ascension of Christ?

These are not questions of secondary importance. Neither are they intended to motivate out of false guilt. Neither are they theological inquiries to test or prove how smart you are.

Rather, these questions are intended to help you awaken to the reality of this ever-present cursed bias in your heart.

We must see that the vital truths of the gospel are of absolute foundational significance for our walk of faith.

The truths of the gospel are a matter of life and death, the difference between heaven and hell, freedom and bondage, blessing and cursing!

Because of this cursed bias in our hearts we must consciously seek to keep the gospel central in our thinking. We must grow, as Peter says, “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” (2 Pet. 3:18).

Only in this way, will we guard ourselves from being led astray by a false gospel and thus easily drift into legalism.

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