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Galatians 1:6-10
No Other Gospel But One

I've been here at Bread of Life for over a year now. Ever since I came, we have had a Wednesday night Bible Study and Prayer Meeting. For most of last year - the year 2021 - we spent our time studying specific prayers found in Scripture; in particular, we focused on the prayers of Paul. And one of the things we noticed as we journeyed through the prayers of Paul together was that many of these prayers were prayers of thanksgiving, that come right at the beginning of Paul's letters. To be sure, there are other prayers that Paul tells us about in his letters, but so often, right after he begins with an introduction of who the letter is from, to whom it's written, and a blessing (such as "grace and peace to you,"), and then usually follows with a section of thanksgiving in prayer. Paul so often ends his introduction by telling that church how he regularly gives thanks to God for them, for their faith and the fruits of their faith. We see this over and over again - such in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, and Philemon. It's a striking pattern. It was very encouraging to study those prayers of thanksgiving together during our Wednesday night Bible Study. It shows a model of love and thanksgiving for fellow believers and churches, and teaches us how to pray for each other. And it shows, over and over again, that what Paul longs for, more than anything, is for the salvation of the members of these churches, that they are true believers with true saving faith, that their faith is evident in the fruits of love and righteousness, and that they are persevering in the faith. When the grace of God is evident in them, he joyfully gives thanks to God and prays that it would continue!

So it is very striking, then, that this letter to the Galatians *lacks* such a section of thanksgiving. We looked at Paul's introduction and time of greetings last week, in verses 1-5. And now, in verses 6-10, we would normally expect to see a time of thanksgiving and prayer - but that's missing. And not only is it missing, but even more striking is what Paul replaces it with: a *very sharp, pointed rebuke*. Instead of telling the Galatians how he joyfully thanks God regularly for their faith, instead he *rebukes them*, sharing how distressed and astonished he is that he *does not have assurance of their faith!* He rebukes the Galatian churches because they are listening to false teachers peddling a false gospel. Now, this kind of rebuke might take us off

guard. But Paul loves the Galatians so much that he rebukes them for abandoning the gospel of Christ by trying to add to it with the false teachings of legalism. But we don't get a free pass here. We, too, are tempted to wander from the gospel, to put our trust Jesus *plus* our own works, or to add or subtract to the gospel message. And so, this passage serves to remind not only the Galatians, but us as well, that there is only one true gospel message, that we must guard that gospel in our own hearts and in our churches against false teachings, and that what matters most is not what other people think of us, but what *God thinks of us*.

So let's walk through Paul's rebuke, one step at a time.

I. Confronting the Temptation to Wander from the Grace of the Gospel (Gal. 1:6-7)

Paul begins his rebuke in verses 6 and 7: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." Paul himself first preached the gospel to these Galatian churches. That is, he came proclaimed to them what we call the gospel message: that there is one, true God; that we have all sinned against Him and deserve His holy wrath and eternal judgment; but that God the Son came down to earth, becoming the God-Man, Jesus Christ; that Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross, and rose again so that anyone who turns to Christ in faith will be forgiven, declared righteous, and saved to eternal life! This is wondrous, glorious news of the free grace of God in Christ Jesus to all who trust in Him alone! This is our only hope of salvation, and it is based purely on the free grace of God.

This is the gospel message that Paul came and preached to the Galatian churches, which they received through faith! But even after they believed, it didn't take long for them to start drift away - to drift away from the gospel, away from the pure message of God's grace. This is why Paul says he is "astonished" that the Galatian Christians are so quickly being tempted to abandon the true gospel he preached to them in exchange for a "different gospel" - a false gospel. And he makes very clear here that this isn't just some minor disagreement he's talking about - their very salvation is on the line. He says they are "deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ" - that is, they are deserting God, abandoning the grace of the gospel of Christ Jesus.

So what exactly prompts Paul to write such a biting rebuke? It's because the Galatians were beginning to listen to a *false gospel* being proclaimed by *false teachers*. There were Jewish

Christians who had come to the Galatian churches, proclaiming a message of Jesus *plus* works of the Law in order to be saved. They proclaimed that in order to really be a good Christian, you have to be a good Jew, you have to be circumcised, you have to follow the Law of Moses, and so forth.

But this is not the gospel of grace in Christ through faith. This is *adding* to the gospel, but saying we need Jesus *plus* the Law, Jesus *plus* works of obedience, Jesus *plus* our own efforts. And Paul makes very clear here that Jesus *plus* anything else is *not the gospel at all*. Paul makes very clear that if we make any change to the one, true gospel, we end up with a *different gospel* - which is no gospel at all. To change the gospel in any way is to *corrupt* it, to “distort the gospel of Christ.”

It’s like the difference between water and coffee. Now, I sometimes have a problem of drinking too much coffee and not enough water. So my loving wife, who cares about me and doesn’t want me to get dehydrated or have kidney problems, will often ask me, “How much water have you had today?” Sometimes, I jokingly reply, “Oh, tons. There was water in every cup of coffee I drank.” But of course, that doesn’t count. Yes, there is indeed water inside every cup of coffee, that’s how it’s made: water steeped in coffee grounds. But the coffee grounds change the water into coffee, so that it doesn’t *hydrate you* like water does, but actually does the opposite: it *dehydrates you*.

And so it is when we try to add to the gospel. Jesus *plus* something else doesn’t equal a better gospel, or even just a different version of the same gospel: Jesus *plus* our own works equals no gospel at all. To add or take away from the good news of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone is to change the message entirely. To change the gospel into a different gospel is to corrupt it, to distort it, leaving you with no gospel at all - and therefore, no hope of salvation.

These false teachers came and preached a different, changed gospel: Jesus *plus* keeping the Law of Moses = salvation. Jesus *plus* circumcision = salvation. Faith in Christ *plus* our own works equals salvation. But there math is wrong - that doesn’t equal salvation, it equals no salvation at all. And the reason why is because they are no longer trusting the actual gospel; they are saying that the grace of Christ isn’t enough, that faith in Christ’s grace isn’t enough, and we instead need to trust in Christ *plus* something else. But the second we do that, we subtract the gospel of Christ and His grace from the equation entirely. It’s like when you multiply something

by zero: no matter how big the first number is, if you multiply it by zero, what are you left with? *Zero*; nothing. And so it is with the gospel of Christ. If we try to change it at all, or add or subtract from it at all, then we abandon the gospel and grace of Christ entirely. This is why Paul takes this so seriously. This is why he writes to rebuke the Galatians and call them back to faith in the gospel of Christ alone!

Now, it would be easy for us to just say, “Those foolish Galatians!” But we can’t do that - this book is for our good, too. So we have to ask ourselves: what are ways that we may be tempted to drift away from the grace of God by changing the gospel in any way? This happens any time we add to or subtract from the gospel in any way. Our hearts are prone to subtly shift in our thinking, maybe even without realizing it, so that before we know it, we’ve added to the list of what’s required in order to be a Christian. As I said last week, we all have an inner Pharisee, a legalistic mindset, where we begin to base our standing before God on how well we’re living the Christian life, on whether or not we’ve committed specific sins, or how much we’re giving, reading our Bibles, praying, or whatever it is. Anytime we begin to base our righteousness before God off of faith *plus* works, we’re in danger drifting away from the gospel.

So then, what are we to do to guard our hearts and our church from deserting the one who has called us to the grace of Christ? For starters, **we must regularly proclaim the gospel to ourselves and each other.** We cannot forget the one, true gospel. We cannot forget that we are righteous *by grace alone*, not by works, through *faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ alone!* We must proclaim this good news to ourselves daily! And this is also part of why we have spiritual disciplines in our lives: reading the Bible, praying, being part of a local church. Things that don’t save us or contribute to our righteousness - no, that’s by grace through faith in Christ alone! But they *do* help strengthen and preserve our faith. We read the Bible and come to church, hearing the Word, singing about the gospel, being encouraged by our brothers and sisters, pray - and the Lord uses these things to strengthen and sustain our faith and to hold us fast to Himself, not letting us drift away.

But this also means that we must be on guard and not let the gospel message be corrupted, bringing us to our next point...

II. We Must Guard the Gospel Against False Teachers and Teachings (Gal. 1:8-9)

In verses 8-9, Paul gives us a double warning against being lured away from the gospel by any false teachings: “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”

These verses are basically saying the same thing; Paul’s repeating himself for emphasis, just to make sure we understand the gravity of what he’s saying. Since there is only one gospel, if someone proclaims to us a *different gospel*, which is in fact a *false gospel*, then we should consider them *accursed* - that is, under the wrath and condemnation of God; we should not consider them Christians nor listen to them. This is a warning: do not be fooled by false teachers; have nothing to do with them, do not listen to them, don’t give them a platform, don’t let them having teaching or leadership positions in our churches, do not even consider them Christians - consider them to be *accursed*. Therefore, we must be on guard - we must know the true gospel backwards and forwards, and we must be able to spot any counterfeit gospels that rear their ugly heads.

There are many false teachings, false gospels, today.. For example, we know that Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses change the gospel entirely, preaching a different Christ and a different gospel. These are no gospels at all. But we also have to recognize this is true of the Catholic Church. Now, it is possible for a Catholic to be a Christian, to trust in the true gospel and be saved - but it is much harder because the Catholic Church itself officially denies the gospel. The official teaching of the Catholic Church is that faith *plus good works and religious rites* are required in order to receive grace from GOD and be saved! In fact, the Catholic Church officially holds that faith in Christ alone *is not enough to be saved*. That is not the gospel. That is a false gospel. And Paul would hear that and say, “Whoever preaches that is *accursed*.” And that means they have no gospel at all - no grace, no hope of salvation. Now, I know that sounds harsh and not very nice. And I know that we live in the heart of Catholic country - I know many of you grew up Catholic, and many of your friends and family members are Catholic. I’m not trying to beat up on Catholics or anything like that. But if we actually love our Catholic neighbors, friends, and family members, then we need to love them as much as Paul loved the Galatians and warn them that if they are putting their hope for salvation in anything other than the free grace of Christ through faith, then they are abandoning the gospel for a false gospel.

There are many other examples that we could point to, but the question remains: how do we guard the gospel message? I want to make two practical applications for how we can do this.

1. First, we need to be very careful about who we listen to.

Weigh everything you hear from a preacher, teacher, author, or anyone else *according to the word of God*. As 1 John 4 says, we need to “test the spirits” of what we hear. Don’t just take someone’s word for it: weigh it according to the Word. Make sure it lines up with what the Bible says. There are many false teachers out there; we need to be wary.

Now, this doesn’t mean that everyone we disagree with is a false teacher. No, there are many things we can disagree on and still be unified brothers and sisters in Christ, even unified as members of the same church. We can disagree on how we interpret certain Bible verses, for example. But there are many fundamentals of the faith that we *cannot* disagree on. We *cannot disagree* on the gospel. So if someone starts peddling a teaching that sounds funny to you, take to it the scriptures. Are they basing what they’re teaching in the Scriptures, or something else? Are they presenting a sound, reasonable interpretation of the Scriptures? If so, even if you may not agree with their interpretation, that’s fine, they probably not a false teacher, just a brother or sister trying to understand the scriptures, just like us. But if it sounds like they are twisting the Word of God to make it say something it just plainly doesn’t say, *then be very careful and wary, because that might just be a false teaching*. If you’re unsure, seek the counsel of a fellow Christian you trust to be sound in the faith. This is part of why we have each other, as a local church! This is part of why we have pastors! If you stumble on a new teaching, or hear something that sounds funny or wrong to you, then bring it to the scriptures, and ask your fellow church members, as your pastors - ask me! - to help you assess it and think through it.

2. Secondly, we have the responsibility to guard the teaching and preaching ministry of our church.

This is part of why we have a statement of faith as a church, and why we have pastors, who are meant to be sound in gospel doctrine and able to rightly teach it. But what if the problem is with what *one of our pastors or church leaders is teaching*? Well, this is part of why we believe the Bible teaches *congregationalism*. Ok, that’s a long word - what does this mean? *Congregationalism* means that the final *earthly* authority in a local church is the *congregation*, not the pastors, not a bishop or pope, not other churches, or an association or denomination. Yes, pastors have legitimate leadership and authority - they are meant to be the *first line of defense*

when it comes to rightly preaching, teaching, and defending the gospel and right teaching of the Bible. But this passage shows us, very clearly, that this responsibility also falls to every Christian, every member of every local church. The congregation as a whole has the *responsibility and authority* to appoint pastors in their church, and to remove them if they are no longer preaching the gospel.

So no, this doesn't mean that we should be suspicious of our pastors and every church leader - no, there should be a healthy trust that exists, when things are working rightly. But it does mean that if I, or any other pastor of this church, ever starts preaching a different gospel, or tries to change the gospel, then the congregation has the authority and responsibility to remove me or any other false teacher from the pulpit and from leadership. The congregation - all of us, as believing church members - have this authority and responsibility. And this is because the *ultimate authority* isn't even the congregation - it's *the true gospel message of Christ, given to us by God in His Holy, inerrant Word, the Bible!*

Therefore, we must guard the gospel we have been entrusted with. We must be careful stewards of the Christian faith once and for all delivered to the saints.

But to do this...

III. We Must Seek Approval from God, Not Other People (Gal. 1:10)

In verse 10, Paul writes, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." In other words, Paul is saying that the fear of man and seeking to please people is the exact opposite of living a life of faith as a servant of Christ. Such thinking leads away from the gospel and towards accepting false teachings. Paul is saying here that if he wanted to please people and seek the approval of others, he wouldn't have become "a servant of Christ."

We cannot seek to please God and seek to please others. We must choose between *the fear of God* and *the fear of Man*. We must choose to either seek the *approval of other people* or the *approval of God alone*. We are either slaves to what other people think of us (which we will never live up to), or we are servants of Christ Jesus, in whom we are accepted simply by grace through faith. Being a Christian is incompatible with being a people pleaser.

No matter what you do, you're going to upset other people in your life. If we choose to follow God and live a life of faith in the grace of God, then *our lives will necessarily look different from the lives of unbelievers all around us*. And that's going to be offensive to them; there will necessarily be a conflict between living as a servant of Christ and living as part of the unbelieving world. And this is only becoming more and more true in our day in age as our culture becomes increasingly less Christian, increasingly more secular and immoral, increasingly more hostile to biblical views of morality - such as a biblical understanding of marriage and sexuality, gender, objective truth claims, the sanctify of human life in the womb, and so on. There's an inevitable collision between the way of Christ and the way of the world.

We might be tempted to just try and make the Christian life or church more attractive, more entertaining, more acceptable and pleasing to people. But that's a very dangerous path. In fact, even the gospel message itself is offensive. As we proclaim the gospel, we proclaim that *every single person is a sinner, that we all deserve death and eternal damnation in Hell under the wrath of God, and that there is only one way to salvation: the grace of God for all who trust in Jesus Christ alone through faith!* That's an exclusive, offensive message to the unbelieving world. It requires us to actually *confront* our unbelieving friends and family members and call them away from believing lies, false teachings, false gospels - and to believe in the only true gospel of Jesus Christ! And when we do this, people might get upset. People might call you a bigot. They might call you self-righteous. They might accuse you of being mean and intolerant, arrogantly assuming that your way is the only right way, and calling other people's beliefs and lifestyles wrong. And so, we might be tempted to water down the gospel and make it *nicer*, more palatable, so that people might accept it and find it more pleasing. But that's not love - it's the fear of man, seeking to be approved by people and not God. That's the temptation that leads us towards embracing false gospels that appeal to itching ears and seem nicer to man, but actually abandon the only really hope any of us have! To actually love other people, we have to abandon any desire to seek their approval and acceptance; we cannot be people-pleasers and truly love them at the same time.

I confess that I struggle with this constantly; fear of man and seeking to please other people and win their approval - this is a huge temptation for me, and sometimes I give in. But thankfully, the gospel undercuts the fear of man. The gospel gives us grace of forgiveness for when we give into it. And it also provides the grace we need to overcome it. You see, living as a

servant of Christ *will not* lead to pleasing other people or being approved of by the world. But *it is the only way* to be accepted by God and please Him. ONE day, we will all stand before the Lord and give an account to the One who knows all and sees all; our lives will be laid bare before Him. And He is the righteous, Holy Judge - His standard is complete perfection, perfect righteousness! *That* is the day that should most concern us! At the end of the day, that's the only verdict that matters - what God thinks of us! And the good news of the gospel is that if we're trusting in the grace of Christ alone, then we are *completely forgiven of our sins and declared righteous before God!* If you're trusting in Christ alone, then you have been called to *grace*. By grace you have been saved! By grace you are accepted before God and declared righteous! By grace, God is pleased with you in Christ Jesus! By grace, you have been made a servant of Christ, so that we actually *can* live to please God and obey Him in Christ through faith!

And this means that truth of the gospel sets us free from being slaves of what people think, and frees us to live as servants of Christ! We are free to know the truth: that it just doesn't matter whether we are accepted by the world, or whether we please other people or not, or what they think of us - this doesn't matter, because *God has declared you righteous despite your sins, He has accepted you on the basis of grace, He has given you the approval that Christ Himself deserves, and He is pleased with you as His beloved child in Christ Jesus!*

Because the gospel is true, we can have a new perspective: pleasing man does not matter; all that matters is pleasing God in Christ Jesus through faith! This guards our hearts against the Fear of man and people-pleasing. It also guards our hearts against legalism, self-righteousness, and adding to the gospel. When what we're truly seeking is God's and approval, then all we need to do is rest in Christ. Trusting in the grace of God held out for us in the gospel of Christ - that's our only hope. There is none other. That's our only way to please God and be accepted by Him. That's the only way to salvation, righteousness, and eternal life.

And if you're not a Christian this morning, this free grace is for you: you don't have to clean yourself up or do enough good works; simply believe that Christ did everything necessary in His life, death, and resurrection to save you, and He will! Simply by grace! Then make your faith public through baptism and join a gospel-preaching church to help you live a life of faith in Christ. If you have any questions about this, I would *love* to speak with you. Let us pray.