

January 28, 2007

## “One True Gospel” Galatians 1:6-10

FCF: Unclear as to what really matters

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because there is but one gospel,  
(magnet) we must see any others for what they are.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Those of you who were here last week know that we are just beginning a series through the book of Galatians. You also know Paul is angry. We see that in the abrupt beginning to the letter. There are no words of greetings – no prayer, praise, thanksgiving, or commendation. Just astonishment. Paul can hardly believe what he’s just heard.

And so he’s angry. Why? Why is Jesus’ apostle angry? Understand this is not a tantrum. His anger is not personal. It is pastoral. He is concerned not for himself but for the people to whom he is writing and for name of the One He has been enlisted to serve. That said, his anger makes us uncomfortable. The tone makes us nervous. Admit it. And as I’ve thought about this over the last few days, it seems a question then needs to be asked. Do we believe there are some things worth getting angry over? Do we believe there are some things worth taking a stand for? And if so, what are they? And why?

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Galatians 1:6-10](#)

### **PRAYER OF ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Jill Pole was thirsty. She knew that much – that her throat was parched and a stream was before her. And so too was a Lion ([READ The Silver Chair, pp.16-18](#)):

*The thirst became so bad that she almost felt she would not mind being eaten by the Lion if only she could be sure of getting a mouthful of water first. “If you’re thirsty, you may drink.”... “Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion. “I’m dying of thirst,” said Jill. “Then drink,” said the Lion. “May I – could I – would you mind going away while I do?” said Jill. The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience... “I daren’t come and drink,” said Jill. “Then you will die of thirst,” said the Lion. “I suppose I must go and look for another stream then.” “There is no other stream,” said the Lion. It never occurred to Jill to disbelieve the Lion – no one who had seen his stern face could do that – and her mind suddenly made itself up. It was the worst thing she had ever had to do, but she went forward to the stream, knelt down, and began scooping up the water in her hand. It was the coolest, most refreshing water she had ever tasted.*

Such went Jill’s first encounter with Aslan in C. S. Lewis’ [The Silver Chair](#). Such is the theme of Paul’s words before us. There is no other stream, no other gospel. Only one.

Oh, Paul had been accused of bending and twisting on such things – of contorting his message to suit his audience. But his accusers misread his commitment to be “all things to all men” for the sake of the gospel to mean that there was more than one gospel. Hardly. It was precisely because there is but one gospel that Paul was willing to then go to such lengths to communicate it. He was willing to do whatever needed to be done for the gospel. And he was willing to say whatever needed to be said as well. You see here in verses 8 and 9, he pronounces a curse, *anathema*, God’s terrible judgment, upon anyone – no matter who it is, including himself – who would preach any other message.

But why? Because there is but one gospel. There is but one gospel. There may be other messages. There may be other propositions and speculations. But only one gospel. Which is to say that all others are false. And we need to see them for what they are. What, after all, do we see here of false gospels – their teachings and their effects?

### **I. ANY OTHER IS DAMAGING**

First we see that any other gospel is damaging (**READ Galatians 1:6-7a**). Paul's audience has been "troubled" – shaken, agitated, stirred up. Such is the very effect described in the pronouncement from the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 (**READ Acts 15:24**). The sense is that what once was settled and calm has become rattled and broken.

*A) Evidenced in the Present Situation*

We see this damage evidenced in the present situation. Look with me a bit further into the letter (**READ Galatians 5:13-15, 25-26**). Why does Paul have to say such things?

1. Inability to admit fault

Because of an inability to admit fault – to say one was wrong and to own the hurt caused. Paul has to say such things because any other gospel leads to an inability to admit fault.

2. Inability to forgive

And an inability to forgive as well. And inability to forbear, to be patient, to extend mercy and grace because, outside of the true gospel, no such mercy and grace is known.

*B) Reflected in Paul's Past*

This damage was evidencing itself already. Paul had heard news of it. And so it came as no surprise. For such troubling, such damage, was reflected in his own past.

1. What he could see in himself

Think back to a text from a few weeks ago (**READ Philippians 3:2-7**). Such passion and zeal. But none of it "according to knowledge," as he says in Romans 10.

2. What he could see in others

He'd seen it in himself. And he'd seen it in others. He'd seen the blood of Stephen on the street. He'd had orders to hunt others down and end this movement. He'd heard the unrest within the Sanhedrin anytime anyone questioned the direction they were going.

He'd seen what this commitment to another gospel had done to himself and to others. He had come to see that there was but one gospel. And so he stood firm.

*Illustration:*

The destructiveness of other gospels, other hopes, comes out in so many ways. It will crush you. Think with me of the TV show, "American Idol." You watch these auditions and you wonder what in the world some of them were thinking going in there. But you don't have to wonder as they come out. Their fragile hopes have given way to despair. And if not despair, then rage. That is, in miniscule, what's going on here.

*Application:*

Any gospel other than the one true gospel will leave you brittle within. Brittle within and broken between. This message is the only thing that can provide the lubricant for the friction of our relationships – freeing us to admit fault, impelling us to extend forgiveness. Going beyond external civility to genuine affection. And so we must see all others for what they are – damaging. And so on the one true gospel we must stand.

**II. ANY OTHER IS DISTORTING**

But that takes us to the second point. Why are other messages so damaging? What is it that causes such carnage? The distorting, the turning, the altering, the changing of the gospel (**READ Galatians 1:6-7**). Distortion – this is what brings damage.

*A) Not a Frontal Attack*

But there are a couple of things worth noting. First, this is not a frontal attack.

1. Not by blatant evil

This was not blatant evil. Gross immorality was not the problem here.

2. Not by blatant error

Nor was it blatant error. These teachings did not come tagged with a “heresy” label.

*B) But a Subtle Undermining*

The enemy has many tools in his toolbox, many weapons in his war chest. He needs not attack head-on. Sometimes subtle undermining can be far more effective. Now what do I mean by this? What forms do these more subtle attacks take?

1. Taking away – the error of liberalism

One would be what we could call “the error of theological liberalism” – the taking away of the authority of the Word of God, the convenient revisions of the faith true and sure.

2. Adding to – the error of conservatism

That would be one. And Paul addresses that elsewhere. But that’s not what we see here. The error of liberalism is not the issue. It’s the error of conservatism – not the arrogance of taking away but of adding to. Not assuming there’s too much but there’s not enough. Look with me at one of the sermons to the Galatian churches (**READ Acts 13:38-39**).

Now let the power of that statement hit you. This is the radical message of Christianity – the one true gospel. Nothing but Jesus. Nothing but His cross. Nothing. To add anything to what Jesus has done is to lessen the wonder of what He has done.

*Illustration:*

Think of it this way. In a whole host of things in life, if you add one thing to another, you change its very nature. Case in point – water. Cool, clear, clean, needed for health for a whole host of reasons. Ah, but if heated and run through a certain bean roasted and ground in just the right way, then you have the stuff of magic – enough to get even me up in the morning. It’s no longer water. It’s a whole new thing – coffee.

Now, there’s one important qualifier. Adding grounds to the water makes a good and helpful thing. Adding anything to the gospel makes a damnable and harmful thing.

*Application:*

And it’s all so subtle. But this has been Satan’s way, his ploy, from the beginning – asking Eve, “*Did God actually say...?*” “*Did Paul actually say forgiveness of sins and freedom from all these things could come by faith in Jesus’ work alone? Really?*”

What would the equivalents be for us today? It’s so subtle. What externals might we focus upon, what things might we add to what Jesus has done? Concern for the institution of the family, commitment to fellowship, outreach, and mercy ministry. We might read our Bibles, pray with great regularity, give and sacrifice much of ourselves perhaps even for people who don’t appreciate us. We might be doing all those good things. And then something happens. We begin to think, “*That’s why God loves me. That’s what it takes.*” Don’t you see? It doesn’t matter what you add. We’ve destroyed the gospel. We need to see these distortions for what they are – as destroying the gospel.

**III. ANY OTHER IS DESERTING**

And it’s so damaging, damaging because of this distorting. And rooted in all of that is the deserting as well (**READ Galatians 1:6**). This word “deserting” is used in the context of a transfer of allegiance, of soldiers who mutiny, of politicians changing sides.

*A) The Gospel of Grace*

And Paul is grieving because the Galatians – under pressure from the Judaizers (those who said Gentile Christians needed to live like Jews in order to be accepted by God) – had done just this. Deserting that to which they were called – the gospel of grace.

1. Leaving behind the finished work of Christ

Leaving behind this glorious message – “*His work is finished and you must rest in that.*”

## 2. Taking up the work for themselves

Leaving that behind and taking up a new message – “*His work is unfinished and you must finish it yourselves.*” It’s not by grace alone. It’s not through faith alone. They were leaving behind the finished work of Christ and taking up that work for themselves.

### B) *The God of Grace*

Deserting the gospel of grace – that to which they were called. And worse, they were deserting the God of grace, the One who had called them (**READ Galatians 1:6**).

#### 1. Not a principle

Paul speaks here not of forsaking principles. This was not an abstract impersonal thing.

#### 2. But a person

This was all too personal. Deserting the God of grace – the One who called them, who had initiated this relationship. Ezekiel 16 – the LORD speaks of finding an abandoned infant and cleaning, feeding, clothing, nurturing, and marrying her. Luke 15 – Jesus speaks of a lost coin and sheep unable to do anything for themselves, sought and pursued.

And Paul is saying, “*You are deserting Him, betraying all He has done for you.*”

#### *Illustration:*

Think of the assassination of Julius Caesar. Among the conspirators was Marcus Junius Brutus. Caesar not only trusted Brutus, he favored him as a son. According to Roman historians, Caesar resisted the onslaught of the assassins at first. But when he saw Brutus among them with his dagger drawn, Caesar ceased to struggle and, pulling the top part of his robe over his face, asked the famous question, “*You too, Brutus?*”

#### *Application:*

That’s something of the betrayal and desertion we see here. It’s sobering. Oh, how we need to hear this as a message to us. Not just some old parchment to study and examine. To see falling prey to any other gospels for what it is – desertion. To see Him for who He is – “*the One who called you in the grace of Christ*” – such that we could not bear the thought of such a turning, that we could not imagine or envision such a thing.

### **CONCLUSION:**

All of this is to say that when Paul receives word that the churches of Galatia are leaving all this behind, he is astonished at what has happened. And we should be too. But on our guard as well. After all, who were these people? How had the churches of Galatia gotten started? Through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas! Now think about that. And then consider that these same people – possibly within just a few months – are described as quickly deserting the God of grace! Think of who they were! And think of who we are. Look, there was a snake in the garden then. You don’t think he’s present now? Breathing out half-truths to ensnare us. You don’t think there’s a part of every one of us that would find such Jesus-plus, Jesus-less teaching attractive? Be serious!

But may it never be. May we continue to grow not only in humble recognition of the waywardness of our condition and the dangers of such teachings, but in an awe-struck amazement that He called us (!) in the grace of Christ. May our hearts continue to be transfixed and transformed by the reality that He set His affections upon us before the beginning of time, worked through the centuries to bring about His plan to redeem all things (including us), sent His Son (**READ Galatians 1:4**), and His Spirit to apply it to our hearts. May our minds be shaped and our course be set by the Word through which He speaks and the apostolic witness He has provided. May these things be so – even of us.

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