

**Word Of Encouragement
The Gospel According To Galatians**

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Please note the use of the ESV text of Scripture.

Gospel 101

As we begin today's study, let us summarize the Apostle Paul's gospel and the "other gospel" of the Judaizers:

Simple Gospel of the Apostle Paul:

(1) "Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, (2) at that moment you are saved-delivered-rescued from sin and God's wrath; (3) now you live obediently according to God's Law because the Spirit has written it in your hearts" (Eph. 2:8-10: Because of God's mercy, we are saved by grace, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared beforehand for us to walk in). Paul writes in Ephesians 2:4-10:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ- by grace you have been saved- ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Christ plus nothing equals salvation-deliverance and the fruitful obedience of faith because of our life-giving union with Jesus...

The Judaizers' "Other Gospel":

(1) “Believe upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and (2) keep the Law of God the best you can; and then (3) you are saved.” (Contrast from Machen, ‘Notes on Galatians’, pg. 49).

Christ plus cooperation with God equals salvation-deliverance...

In today’s study we want to consider further the Apostle Paul’s gospel that was being exchanged for “another gospel which is no gospel at all?” Our ‘Word of Encouragement’ will focus on unpacking the sweet and amazing gospel of Jesus Christ, and how Paul summarizes it in Galatians 1:1-5, and how he responds when the Churches of Galatia begin to turn from the true gospel to a false one!

Galatians 1:1-10: Paul, an apostle- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead- 2 and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia: 3 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 6 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- 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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 Galatians 1:6, Paul says that the Galatian churches have “amazed,” “astounded,” or “caused him to marvel” at just how quickly they had turned away from the true gospel of grace that he had preached to them and how quickly they have exchanged it for a false gospel!

We are all guilty of “quickly” turning away from the true gospel. Sin has tainted us in our hearts, minds, and wills in such a way that we want to work our way up to God, rather than having him send us (from God to man) a Savior to deliver us from our sins, and to rescue us from our awful plight. Here is a summary of Paul’s gospel from Galatians 1:3-4:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...

The Apostle Paul summarizes his gospel at the beginning of his letter by saying that Jesus “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age.” Paul is saying that according to the eternal will of God, God sent his son to deliver us, or rescue us from a world of sin and misery by giving Jesus “for our sins”. Jesus was offered “for our sins” as a substitute for those whom he loved so that we could live as sons and heirs of God in Christ Jesus (Gal. 4:1-6). The hope of every Christian should be that Jesus gave himself willingly, because of his great love for us, “**for our sins.**” As the Apostle Paul says it differently in Romans 5:8:

“...God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.”

The Sin Problem, or Rather “Our Sin Problem”

In order to consider properly the Gospel of Christ preached and proclaimed by Paul, we must first understand the sin problem of mankind. If we do not have a healthy and biblical understanding of sin, then we will never understand the true Biblical gospel of grace in Christ Jesus. In fact, if we have a low view of sin, we will necessarily have a low view of grace (“cheap grace” as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it!). To put it another way, if we have yet to consider our great problem we are in due to sin, we will not be amazed at the mercy and grace of God revealed in the solution which is our rescue and deliverance in Jesus!

If we do not understand the depths of our sin as well as the comprehensiveness of sins effect on mankind, we will not understand truly why we need God’s grace at all!

So what is our sin problem? The Bible says that sin is exhaustive and comprehensive in all human beings. Sin has tainted all of our faculties as image-bearing creatures in our hearts, minds, and will. In other words, sin has tainted *what we love* as well as *how we love*, the way we think, the way we decide to do what we do, and even the way we understand sin *as sin!* When the great film director Woody Allen was caught in a heinous sin with a member of his own family, the press asked him why he did it. He answered: “The heart wants what the heart wants.” That’s pretty good theology for a director, and that is getting at our problem better than some Christians do today! The heart has been affected by sin and it desires whatever it selfishly desires regardless of what God thinks about it, or how much damage it might bring to others in this world.

We must understand that sin deceives us into thinking that we are better than we truly are in God’s sight. Sin tells us that we are more important than others (including God), and grows into a deep and self-centered, godless, selfishness that manifests itself in more gross and heinous sins as it complicates and reproduces itself within us. As Paul says in Romans 1:29-32:

[Those who exchange the truth of God for a lie] were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

Sin is not only exhaustive and comprehensive, but it is against God's will revealed in the Law. Sin is illegal, or truly 'against the law' in God's world and worthy only of God's holy and righteous punishment and wrath. As Paul says in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." The Law is good, and holy and righteous (Romans 7:7ff), but all sinful human beings are condemned by it because we cannot truly live perfectly by the Law.

We all deserve the eternal death for our sins, and the recognition of this causes the whole world to be silenced before God's throne (Rom. 3:20).

Because of the real problem of sin that is exhaustive and comprehensive in us, and the fact that it is illegal in God's world, there are only two ways to be saved from our awful predicament and plight: (1) We can keep the Law perfectly (and we cannot do this, even though many on the broad road that leads to destruction are giving it their best!), or (2) Trust in Christ who was our Law-Keeper on our behalf and who took the curse of the Law upon himself (the narrow way that leads to life)! This is why the gospel is truly "good news" for undeserving sinners! Although the Law of God (revealed summarily in the Ten Commandments) is good, holy and righteous, nonetheless it is "bad news" for sinners who cannot keep it! For a sinner then, Law is bad news (especially since we are to be perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect, Matt. 5:48), and the gospel of Jesus is "good news".

When we attempt to trust in Christ and then add something to his work *for us*, we are becoming in essence like the Judaizers. The Apostle Paul knows the Law is holy, righteous and good (Romans 7:7-12), yet he says he died to it as a way of earning salvation. In fact, he died to the law just so he could live to God, that is be alive to God's righteousness, and not his own dead works.

Galatians 2:19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God

"I Am A Good Person!"

Now some may be thinking more highly of themselves than they ought. Perhaps you are thinking: "Well, I am not that bad, and I try really hard to keep the 10 commandments, to love God with all my heart, soul, mind and strength, and my neighbor as myself. I am not like others who are murderers and rapists. I am a pretty good person and I have tried my darnedest to live a good life." Perhaps sin has deceived you in such a way that you don't even think of yourself as a sinner. But may I remind you that God demands perfection to his holy law?!

Now before you run off and try to be perfect, I must remind you that even if you were to live it externally and outwardly perfect from this day forth, what are you going to do about the actual guilt and sin problem within you (even if you can fool us all outwardly with your behavior, you cannot fool God because all hearts, thoughts, and motivations are clearly seen by Him to whom we must one day give an account. Listen to this:

Hebrews 4:12-13: For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. 13 And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

"Naked and exposed" before God's eyes, not only our outward behavior, but the "thoughts and intentions" of our hearts! We must understand that when the Law says to us "Do not commit adultery" for example, even if we do not commit adultery formally in our bodies, if we think lustfully about a person in our hearts, then we are guilty of adultery (cf. Matthew 5:21ff). If we do not in our behavior really steal from another, but desire to have what belongs to our neighbor we have sin against "You shall not steal." If we hate our neighbor (those who are around us as human beings), or if we are unwilling to show mercy, love and grace to them perfectly, we have already broken the commandment not to murder!

It is interesting to note that apparently the Apostle Paul before he was a Christian was able to make the first nine commandments "doable" and his sin convinced him that he was a righteous, no "blameless" person before the Law (Phil. 3:5-7). Saul the Pharisee could "fence the law" well enough to do his best and hope for the best from God on the last day, but there was that tenth commandment that caused him to die (as one who was trying to live before God through the Law). In other words, Paul could keep externally and outwardly (or so he thought) the first nine commandments, but the tenth was a doozie! He recalls in Romans 7:

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment,

produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law, sin lies dead. 9 I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. 10 The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. 11 For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me.- Romans 7:7-11

Saul the Pharisee thought more highly of himself that he should have in his law-keeping efforts, but it was the commandment “You shall not covet” that made him realize that he was truly sinful and guilty before God! Coveting is what we all do in desiring something or someone that someone else has! If you are guilty of breaking one commandment, you’re guilty of breaking the whole law (James 2:10). It is interesting to ponder what Paul was coveting. Perhaps he saw another Pharisee more “righteous” than himself, and so he “coveted” the other Pharisee’s righteousness? Hmmm.

Think of how highly we think of ourselves oftentimes. If we accomplish merely outward obedience, we are quick to say with the Pharisee in Luke 16: “I thank you God I am not like other sinners...” “I’ve lived a good life, trying my best to do God’s will, and I have never murdered anyone!” All kinds of ways we try to gain a right standing before God based on our own so-called law-keeping (even though our best law keeping is law breaking before God’s holy judgment throne!).

The good news paradoxically perhaps is that the more we realize our sins before God, not merely our behavior, but our sinful thoughts, words, as well as deeds, we begin to be humbled before God in such a way that we realize that our only hope is his mercy and grace. In other words, the more we know how much we are condemned before God, the more we realize the grace of God in Christ- - and appreciate the great deliverance and rescue of our Savior.

No one necessarily likes to hear about sin. No one necessarily likes to be reminded of how sinful they are, but we all need to be reminded in order to flee from any effort on our part to please God with our works to Christ alone, his mercy and grace alone, which is our only hope. Listen to the wise words of Martin Luther on the importance of the law to reveal our sins- -as well as to hold out Christ to us for our right standing before God!

It is an absolute and unique teaching in all the world, to teach people, through Christ, to live as if there were no law or wrath or punishment. In a sense, they do not exist any longer for the Christian, but only total grace and mercy for Christ's sake. Once you are in Christ, the law is the greatest guide for your life, but until you have Christian righteousness, all the law can do is to show you

how sinful and condemned you are. In fact, to those outside of Christian righteousness, the law needs to be expounded in all its force. Why? So that people who think they have power to be righteous before God will be humbled by the law and understand they are sinners”- Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*.

You see, sin has made all false religions (and some religions that claim to be ‘Christian’) to seek right standing before God in our own works and righteousness- -but this is a failure truly to understand the depths of our sin.

All religions apart from the true gospel revealed in the Christian faith are “works-righteousness” religions, or man’s attempt to please God apart from Christ. Think about all of the other religions, including Islam or Judaism, the goal is to appease God, or please God with our own self-righteousness, and not receive any righteousness that he has revealed to us. In fact, all of the world’s religions, including the most heathen, pagan religions is an attempt to exchange the righteousness of God with that revealed in the Gospel as Romans 1:18-25 teaches us:

Romans 1:16-25: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

“They exchanged the truth about God for a lie...”

This is a summary of sin’s deceptiveness on the entire human race. Sin causes us to try to reach up and get to God through our own feeble and puny efforts – only to wind up damned and condemned before God! In contrast, the true gospel

is a rescue operation for undeserving, non-seeking sinners who cannot love God from the heart as God commands, who cannot think God's thoughts after him as God's commands and do the right thing, and those who cannot will or decide to follow God, or love God, or be obedient to God apart from the regenerating life and power of the Holy Spirit!

We really don't care about grace, because we want so badly to earn it and to work for our salvation, which is in reality truly falling short of the glory of God and sinning against his Christ, failing to understand truly our sin problem and ultimately nullifying the grace of God in Christ, so that Christ did not have to truly die if we can muster up enough strength and goodness to satisfy God...but the truth is- -we cannot! As Galatians 2:20-21 teaches us:

I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if justification were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The Apostle Paul writes to the Galatian churches and us today saying it is only in Christ's rescue operation for sinners that we can ever hope to be saved! Salvation is found in Christ alone: his righteousness, his law-keeping, his Person and his Work in its entirety, and that is why it is "good news"!

Sin is deep and a real problem that we can only be "rescued" or "delivered from" which is exactly Paul's gospel in a nutshell. Paul says in Galatians 1:3-5 that Christ has been delivered up for our sins. This means that Christ has taken the curse of the Law upon himself (Col. 2:11-16) in order that we might truly be righteous. Christ has become sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21) so that we might receive his righteousness alone and be reckoned or made righteous in God's sight. Listen to the good news as Paul says it in 2 Corinthians 5:21:

For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

When we try to add our good works, or our obedience, or our churchly works, or our faith, or anything else to the simple, amazing, gracious, and glorious gospel of Christ, we have added something else, and we end up nullifying the grace of God. Yet when we truly understand how deep sin goes in our hearts, minds and wills, we are reminded that our only hope for being delivered is through the Lord Jesus Christ!

God sent Jesus to save us, deliver us, rescue us his people, even though we resist and often do not want God's help!

“Smile!”

I had a wise, godly, and wonderful professor at seminary, Dr. D. Clair Davis, who would remind the students of two important truths that accentuate the grace of God in Christ. He would say (this is the gist what he said, I cannot recall the exact words and I believe he had learned this from his teacher, but I cannot recall...):

***“Smile, you’re a bigger sinner than you think...
...but Christ is a greater Savior than you can imagine!”***

What did Dr. Davis mean by this statement? This profound and wise statement that he made was in response to those who would often come to him for counseling merely counting the outward sins and transgressions against God. For instance, a student who wanted to grow in godliness might say to Dr. Davis: “I used foul language last evening and became angry and abrupt with my wife and children, and I just feel like such a sinner because of it; I truly want to be like Jesus.”

Now the student’s intent was to be obedient to Jesus, but he was seeing only the outward behavior (that was wrong), and not considering the root of the sinful behavior in his own heart. Christians are in danger when they only consider outward behavior and not the root of that behavior from the heart.

When this student failed outwardly in this way, he wanted to be righteous again essentially, and he was feeling guilty and condemned. Dr. Davis wanted him to realize that his foul language and anger were merely the tip of the sinful iceberg – and yet Christ was a greater Savior than we can imagine. Dr. Davis was not undermining the importance of God’s Law and commandments, but placing our focus in our failure on Christ’s law-keeping “alone” – and not our own. If we do not understand this, then we may oppositely say something like this:

“I’m a pretty good and righteous person! I have gone a long time without any foul language or anger.” You see the student was focusing on himself and his own righteousness (and not Christ!) when he failed and sinned outwardly, as well as when he succeeded outwardly by not cursing and being angry. At that moment, the student’s righteousness was found in himself *plus Christ!*

This can be tricky and subtle, and we have to be looking constantly for instances in our lives of “Lord, I thank you that I am not a sinner like...” and rather be looking to Christ and the Law in order to say confidently “in Christ”: “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.” (cf. Luke 18:9-12). Martin Luther wrote concerning our confidence as sinners being in Christ alone- -not looking even to our best works, but to Jesus and his perfect works and law-keeping *for us*:

“For human beings by nature, when they get near either danger or death itself, will of necessity examine their own worthiness. We defend ourselves before all threats by recounting our good deeds and moral efforts. But then the remembrance of sins and flaws inevitably comes to mind, and this tears us apart, and we think, “How many errors and sins and wrongs I have done! Please God, let me live so I can fix and amend them.” We become obsessed with our active righteousness and are terrified by its imperfections.

But the real evil is that we trust our own power to be righteous and will not lift up our eyes to see what Christ has done *for us*....So the troubled conscience has no cure for its desperation and feeling of unworthiness unless it takes hold of the forgiveness of sins by *grace*, offered free of charge in Jesus Christ, which is this passive or Christian righteousness....**If I tried to fulfill the law myself, I could not trust in what I had accomplished, neither could it stand up to the judgment of God. So...I rest only upon the righteousness of Christ..which I do not produce but receive, God the Father freely giving it to us through Jesus Christ.**”

We must ever repent of how we try to replace the righteousness of Christ with so-called righteousness of our own making—which is no righteousness at all! This is just one example of how we do it, and so we need to learn to say: “Smile! You’re a bigger sinner than you think...but Christ is a greater Savior than you can imagine!”

“Amazing Grace! How Sweet the Sound that Saved a Wretch Like Me!”

If this truth of the gospel would penetrate deep within our hardened and proud hearts and minds, we just might be a gracious, merciful and forgiving people in the Church as Christ has called us to be! A biblical understanding of sin and grace causes true humility to be cultivated in us all, and this causes us to be meek, and for God to dwell with us because we have contrite hearts. Be reminded of these great passages of Scripture:

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite...

Matthew 5:5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

What makes us contrite, meek, and humble but the realization of our need and condition before God as sinners, and to recognize God's undeserved rich mercy and grace bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ?! Yet there was another gospel that was being preached to the Churches of Galatia, and many were turning to it. In fact, the Apostle Paul says in their turning from the true gospel the people were in reality "deserting him who called him in the grace of Christ!" Paul wrote with great urgency and power of the Holy Spirit:

Galatians 1:6-10: 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- 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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.

Because God's grace in Christ is so good, wonderful, sweet and "amazing" as the hymn by John Newton teaches ("Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me"), the Apostle Paul was amazed, astounded, perplexed by the fact that the Galatian Christians had so quickly deserted the God who had called them in the grace of Jesus (Gal. 1:6-7). Paul says later that the false gospel that they had heard from the Judaizers had mesmerized or bewitched them (Gal. 3:1ff), and that they were falling away from grace (Gal. 5:4) because they were believing in Christ's work for them, *plus their own works of the law added to it!*

"Man-Pleasers" and "God-Pleasers": Who Are the True Servants of Christ?

The Judaizers were saying that Paul was trying to be a man-pleaser (Gal. 1:9-10) because he is making the gospel "too easy" for the Galatians. Paul writes to defend himself and to say to them that if he were trying to please men, particularly the Galatian churches, he would not be writing a polemical letter loaded with 'Anathemas' or condemnations! The Apostle Paul was not fearing man, nor trying to please man with his gospel message, rather as a slave or bondservant of Jesus Christ, he was pleasing God by being faithful to the gospel, whether the Galatian churches liked it or not! Paul was faithful as Christ's messenger and servant. Paul writes in Galatians 1:10:

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.

Paul is saying that a true servant of Christ proclaims the only gospel of God and does not live to please man (or to be a “man-pleaser”!) We need to remember in every age of the Church that what is most important and truly matters for the growth and maturity of Christians is not the messenger of the gospel, as much as the gospel itself that the messenger is proclaiming. It is the gospel that must be proclaimed! There have been great and popular teachers in the church who draw many to hear them (just look at many of the successful radio, television ministries, and the top 10 books being sold at bookstores). Just because these teachers have many who listen to them, learn from them, and support them financially does not a gospel preacher make!

Augustine wrote concerning Galatians 1:10 something we should all remember:

...A person does well in wishing to persuade others when it is not himself that he wishes them to like but the truth that he persuades them of....When one pleases others on account of truth, it is not the messenger himself but the truth of the gospel that pleases....Thus the sense [of Galatians 1:10] is, “Do I then try to please men or God? And since it is men that I am trying to persuade of the truth, do I seek to please them? If I still sought to please men I should not be Christ’s servant. For he bids his servants to learn from him to be meek and lowly of heart, which is utterly impossible for one who seeks to please men on his own account, for his own private and special glory.- Augustine, ‘Epistle to the Galatians’ (IB.I.10).

Are those today who are claiming to be servants of Christ man-pleasers or God-pleasers? Are they truly faithful as servants of Christ? Are they faithful to being servants of Jesus Christ like Paul proclaiming God’s rich grace in Jesus, despite persecutions, unpopularity, and rejection? What makes a true teacher and preacher of God is a faithful one! It is not how eloquent or wise the messenger is, the important matter is how faithful he is to the message of Jesus Christ. Does he show his servant hood to Jesus (as Paul did as a servant — bondsman, Gal. 1:10) in his faithfulness to Jesus’ message? How do we rightly judge the messenger so that we listen to the truth? Remember 1 Corinthians 2:1-5:

And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2 For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4 and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5 that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

We must be reminded always to judge the messenger by the gospel, not the gospel by the messenger. In other words, if a person is truly a messenger of Jesus, it will be the gospel that will reveal this to all, regardless of how weak and unpopular he may be. In every age of the Church there is a temptation to judge the gospel by the messenger. We like and look for eloquence, superior wisdom, and popularity, and when we find a messenger like that, we tend to think that this gospel he is preaching is the right one whether it is or not. We judge the gospel by the messenger rather than the messenger by the gospel. As the people of God we are looking for a proclamation of God's gospel and a demonstration of the Spirit's power in changed lives!

If a messenger comes as a servant of Jesus and is not preaching the gospel, he is merely trying to please men and tickle their ears. If he is preaching the one and only gospel in Jesus' name, he is pleasing God! The same Apostle Paul who wrote the Letter to the Churches of Galatia, also warned Timothy that in the last days, many in the Church would be described like this:

2 Timothy 4:1-5: I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. 3 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. 5 As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Paul soberly charges Timothy and all gospel messengers who come in Jesus' name to be reminded to always preach the word, the pure and true gospel of Christ that saves God's people and grows us up into maturity in Jesus. Paul tells Timothy and all gospel messengers to be reminded that they will be faced with a time when people will not endure sound doctrine or teaching, but will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions. Many will turn aside from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

Have you done this as one who claims to be a Christian? Have you wandered off into following those who say they have a "word from the Lord", or are "messengers of Jesus", who gather many together who listen to them, but who are not proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ? Are you constantly testing messengers who come to you in Christ's name by the message?

If the messenger is not preaching the true and offensive, yet sweet and amazing message of the gospel of Christ who died to save sinners and rescue us from this present evil age, who shed his blood for our law-breaking, and offers grace to all who believe upon his name- *-plus nothing - -no works of any kind added to*

it- -but all of grace- - if the messenger is not preaching this truth then he is no messenger or servant of Christ at all, but a messenger seeking merely to please men—and not God.

Martin Luther expresses wisely and soberly the importance of the only gospel and the messenger bringing it faithfully to Christ's people! He wrote in his Commentary on the Galatians:

While we live here on earth, we will be accused, exercised with temptations, oppressed with heaviness and sorrow, and bruised by the law with its demands of active righteousness. Because of this, Paul sets out in this letter of Galatians to teach us, to comfort us, and to keep us constantly aware of this Christian righteousness. For if the truth of being justified by Christ alone (not by our works) is lost, then all Christian truths are lost. For there is no middle ground between Christian righteousness and works-righteousness. There is no other alternative to Christian righteousness but works-righteousness; if you do not build your confidence on the work of Christ, you must build your confidence on your own work. On this truth and only on this truth the church is built and has its being.
Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*.

In our time in the Church of Jesus Christ, if we dare to preach the gospel of pure grace alone in Christ alone, we may be persecuted and we may be frequently amazed at how quickly the majority turns away to a different gospel- -which is no gospel at all! If we dare to be messengers who are approved by God as his servants, we will be viewed oftentimes as offensive in our modern world, especially when we talk of such things as sin, sinners, and the blood of Christ, but for those who have ears to hear by God's grace, we will be offering hope to the lost, and the hope of being rescued and delivered from sin and this present evil age, experiencing the grace and peace of God in Christ, and we will be pleasing God and truly servants of Jesus Christ as the Apostle Paul!

Let the people of God shout loudly with the Apostle Paul in Romans 1:16-17:

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

As you conclude the study today, ask yourself "What has Jesus already done for me in his rescuing me from sin and this present evil age?" BEFORE YOU ASK: "What would Jesus do?" After you're reminded of what Jesus has already done, go forth by faith to bear fruit and good works out of gratitude for what he has done for you (but remember that even your best works are flawed!).

Smile! You're a bigger sinner than you think!

But the gospel is about a Christ who is a greater Savior than you can possibly imagine—and there is constant life-giving grace found in him alone for needy sinners!

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