

Galatians 1:6-10

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: if anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse! ¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Last week Jonathan gave us an overview of Galatians and spoke on the first 5 verses. Now we'll look at another 5 verses!

Last week Jonathan told us that “Paul explains the reason for his writing. He's writing because the Galatians are giving up on the gospel they were given - and Paul isn't having it. There has been some sudden substitution of the true gospel for a false one - those who were assured by Paul that salvation is a free gift of grace, have started to think otherwise. The Galatian error is in thinking that their own works can contribute to their salvation. This is the crisis that Paul addresses. In the first five verses, Paul sets the scene for us - we know who is writing and to whom, and we see the central issue - Paul gives us a brief, but clear explanation of the gospel - "grace and peace through Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins". This is the issue at the heart of the letter, that salvation is because of what Christ has done, rather than what we do.” Jonathan ended with “And the issue is present today too - how many people think that in Christianity, you're saved by some vague 'being a good person'? If that's the impression the world has about Christianity, where did they get it from? In part, unfortunately, they get it from us, from Christians, who do a poor job articulating the gospel and a poor job believing it. But they also get it from their human nature. Our sinful tendency is to think that we can do things ourselves - that we don't need God. Our sinful tendency is to say 'I know better'. Just like Adam and Eve in the garden, we hear the gospel and think 'did God really say that?' Our seeking for our own glory in things means we assume that we ourselves must play some part in our salvation - that we must contribute something. 'Sure God does the major work, but I get some credit somehow.' So the issue in Galatians has never gone away - it's an issue that every single Christian will wrestle with and an issue we need to be constantly reminded of. This letter is as relevant today as it was to the Galatians who first received it.”

It's worth repeating.

So let's go through these 5 five verses.

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Paul is upset that what he told them has so quickly been corrupted. Remember that Paul usually started his preaching in the local synagogue which would be nearly all Jews and few Greek converts to Judaism. He would also be speaking to Greeks in the marketplace and elsewhere and would get followers of the Way from that source as well. It is very hard for Jews, even today, to accept the Gospel without letting go of their centuries of tradition and learning that being righteous and obedient to the Law of Moses was necessary to get to heaven. The concept of earning a place in heaven remains an issue for pretty much everyone who believes in heaven and hell. Paul preached the gospel of grace – not the gospel of works. Today it's still as hard for people to understand that we can get something so wonderful and costly for nothing other than having the faith to believe in Jesus Christ. Paul says he called the Galatians to live in the grace of Christ... a concept that for us who have read the New Testament is fully explained, but they only had parts of the Old Testament and what Paul told them about Jesus. The whole pagan society in the Greek and Roman world believed in gods that needed to be appeased with offerings, sacrifices, prayers, devotion and worship in the hope that they would favour those seeking help from them. There were no atheists around and everyone expected that the gods would not usually do something favourable for nothing, though they didn't expect them always to be fair, just, righteous or nice. When things went wrong, it was often thought that the gods had been offended in some way or were plain angry about things without any reason at all that men could know. The Jewish God was also one who would be angered when his rules for living were broken, so following the

rules – 633 rules in the Law of Moses – was important to find favour with God. Telling people that Jesus would forgive rule breaking and that there would be no adverse consequences was too good to be true for many... and still is for many today. However, the “different gospel” or in other translations “another gospel” was a completely different gospel, not just a variation of what Paul preached.

⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Paul says that this was no gospel at all, a perversion of what he had revealed to them. Paul says that they were trying to do this and would be misleading believers – and by saying trying he was indicating that they hadn’t altogether succeeded. When we looked at Acts 15 Paul had problems with the Jewish converts in Antioch on the issue of circumcision which was resolved at the Council in Jerusalem. The Greeks who converted to Judaism were expected to show their commitment with being circumcised. Some of the Jews who became Christians expected the same thing when Greeks became Christians. We’ll see in chapter 2 how this is explained.

⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!

Paul is angry and without saying directly what the problem is other than that grace was not being preached, he is telling these Galatians that whatever is preached – even with miracles, signs and wonders – that isn’t what he told them, then the result is being cut off from God. This verse is a warning to all who pervert the Gospel – there are heretical variations of Christianity that deny salvation by grace, that insist on rituals being necessary for salvation, that deny the Trinity, that deny Jesus died for our sins... a long list of heresies that infected the church from its beginning, of which the first was the need to be circumcised, but leading to Gnosticism, Montanism, Arianism, Pelagianism and Nestorianism, and today we have offshoots of Christianity like Jehovah’s Witnesses, Mormons, Moonies and many more who pervert the Gospel and lead people astray and into bondage to controlling oppressive organisations. Paul says those who lead others astray are under God’s curse... a terrible place to be for anyone. The Greek word “anathema” means “being set up or being dedicated” – usually for destruction like a sacrifice or something profane being burned up. For those today who think that the Gospel is just about love, forgiveness, toleration and peace while at the same time ignoring the bits that require a change from a sinful lifestyle by turning away (repentance) from sin, they too are under judgment from God for not preaching the full Gospel. They too will be the ones Jesus says he never knew even though they claimed they did so many things for him.

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Paul repeats himself, because he is so upset that they have drifted away from his preaching. These Galatians were convicted by the Holy Spirit that Jesus forgave their sins, that they are new creations, and that they are a community of brothers and sisters in Christ obeying his teaching as revealed to them by Paul. As was agreed at the Council of Jerusalem “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: ²⁹ You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things.” (Acts 15:28-29) This was because the Pharisee converts in the early church were claiming converts needed to be circumcised and like converts to Judaism, follow Jewish dietary customs. Because Romans and Greeks were filled with the Holy Spirit in the same way as the Jews were touched by Holy Spirit, it was clear that ignoring Mosaic law was not a barrier to salvation. Remember the Apostles were all Jews who followed the law of Moses. Sixteenth century wise words from founders of the Protestant Church of England include in Article 7 of the 39 Articles of Religion say “*The Old Testament is not contrary to the New: for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard, which feign that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the Law given from God by Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.*” That closes the matter on moral issues that face the church today where some disagree that Old Testament moral laws still apply. They forget that Jesus, who is God and was there at the beginning along with the Spirit of God, revealed to Moses God’s Laws for the Israelites. Not every moral issue is mentioned in the

four Gospels, and omission of written evidence in the Gospels is not evidence of omission, because Jesus was talking to Jews who all knew the law of Moses. Claiming that the Mosaic law was only for the Israelites wandering in the wilderness and settling as late bronze/early iron age people in the lands granted to them is also wrong. Jesus would not alter a jot nor tittle of it, and came to fulfil the law. As believers, the moral law of the Old Testament must be followed and it isn't just the ten commandments, but the additional rules for living that govern our relationships, both physical and mental, with each other.

¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

Another verse that every Christian needs to take on board. We are here to speak the truth about Jesus, to tell the Good News about how he lived and died and is alive today. If that offends some, then that is no reason to change or miss out things that offend to please the itching ears of those seeking approval of their usually sinful behaviour. Neither is seeking to win favour with others for selfish reasons acceptable. Paul as we have seen when we looked at the book of Acts of the Apostles comes over as someone who was passionate about everything he did. He was passionate about persecuting Christians before his Damascus experience because he believed he was doing it for God. Thereafter he was passionate about revealing Jesus to the world and would never be a people pleaser for a quieter life or to avoid speaking about Jesus. Paul was a Pharisee – and Pharisees loved to be seen as good people, better people; they loved their position in society being seen by men and seeking the approval of men, instead of God. To be a Christian, being nice is not enough – a disciple shares his faith and is open about being a disciple of Jesus, regardless of the disapproval that might bring. None of us should be ashamed of being a Christian, and none of us should believe that our demonstration of our faith should remain inside a church building or inside our homes. Paul is telling the Galatians that he has to serve Jesus and if saying things that will offend are needed, he will do what is necessary without seeking to please people or holding back so that people are not misled and miss knowing God. He wants to make Jesus known to the Galatians so that they walk along the right path and receive all that Jesus has to offer those who put their trust in him.

Matthew Henry said this about verse 10 *The judaizing teachers, by whom these churches were corrupted, had discovered a very different temper; they mixed works with faith, and the law with the gospel, only to please the Jews, whom they were willing to court and keep in with, that they might escape persecution. But Paul was a man of another spirit; he was not so solicitous to please them, nor to mitigate their rage against him, as to alter the doctrine of Christ either to gain their favour or to avoid their fury. And he gives this very good reason for it, that, if he yet pleased men, he would not be the servant of Christ. This he knew was utterly inconsistent: no man could serve two such masters; and therefore, though he would not needlessly displease any, yet he dared **not** allow himself to gratify men at the expense of his faithfulness to Christ. Thus, from the sincerity of his aims and intentions in the discharge of his office, he proves that he was truly an apostle of Christ. And from this his temper and behaviour we may note:-*

- 1. That the great end which ministers of the gospel should aim at is to bring men to God.*
- 2. That those who are faithful will not seek to please men, but to approve themselves to God.*
- 3. That they must not be solicitous to please men, if they would approve themselves faithful servants to Christ.*

Sometimes others will say things better than I could.

Next week we'll look at Paul's testimony which fills in gaps not revealed in Luke's Acts of the Apostles.

Montanism – led by Montanus who claimed he was the embodiment of the Holy Spirit and that true Christians needed mystical revelations while ordinary second-class Christians would be those lacking this closeness with the Spirit. The spirit filled ones lived an ascetic life expecting apocalyptic new revelations.

Arianism – Arian of Alexandria (Egypt) declared that Christ was not truly divine but a created being. God alone is immutable and self-existent, and the Son is not God but a creature with a beginning.

Pelagianism – A British monk living in Rome prompted a school of thought that denied fundamental Christian doctrines including original sin, the fall of man, salvation by grace, predestination and the sovereignty of God. Pelagius and his followers stressed the essential goodness of human nature and the freedom of the human will. Pelagius was concerned about the slack moral standards among Christians, and he hoped to improve their conduct by his teachings, which were pretty much Stoicism with just one god instead of many.

Nestorianism - Originally, Nestorianism envisaged the divine Word as having associated with itself at the Incarnation a complete, independently existing man. From the orthodox point of view, Nestorianism therefore denied the reality of the Incarnation and represented Christ as a God-inspired man rather than as God-made-man. Nestorius insisted that Mary could only have given birth to a human man and not a man who was also God.

Jehovah's Witnesses – deny the Trinity and deny that Jesus is God. They do not celebrate Christian holy days as they claim that they are pagan, but they do celebrate 14 days into the Jewish month Nisan, the date of the Jewish Passover, the day before the first full moon after the Spring equinox. Good Friday is the Friday closest to the first full moon after the Spring equinox and does not usually coincide with the Jewish Passover.

Mormons – they have a revelation from Josiah Smith allegedly found on gold plates read with special spectacles all about the lost tribes of Israel who allegedly went to north America. They accept the Bible but believe that when dead Mormons become gods and goddesses ruling in other heavenly places and worlds provided they have followed the teachings of the Latter Days Saints church. Works and special ceremonies are required to be exalted in the afterlife, and dead ancestors can be called into heaven through ceremonies on earth.

Moonies – Sun Yung Moon claimed to be a messiah carrying on the work of Christ because Jesus had gone to heaven. Jesus would come back, marry and have a family and establish world peace. The major criticism from other churches is the Unification Church's denial of salvation by faith alone. Moon believed that the kingdom of God on earth could be achieved by human effort, including political and economic action. Getting to heaven would be based on what has been done on earth by believers.