

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS
NO OTHER GOSPEL:
FREEDOM IN CHRIST

LESSON 2: "The Source of the Gospel" **Date:** Aug 31/Sept 14, 2014
TEXT: Galatians 1:6-12

INTRODUCTION

Paul's great epistle to the Galatian churches has three main sections: the priority of the gospel (1:1-2:10), the protection of the gospel (2:11-4:31), and the privileges of the gospel (5:1-6:18). Last week, we started considering the priority of the gospel, and did so by studying the gospel's nature. This lesson will analyze a second aspect of gospel—its source—to further compel us to **make the gospel of grace our priority**. Before we jump into the text, let's again briefly consider some more details of the background of this book.

Background: Paul's unequivocal declaration in Galatians 1:6-9 helps us understand that the churches in Galatia were under attack, not so much morally, as doctrinally. False teachers, probably claiming the name Christian, had crept into the churches and were preaching what they called the "gospel." However, it was different from what Paul had preached, for it taught that obedience to the Mosaic Law, in addition to faith in Christ, was necessary for salvation and a righteous standing before God (2:3-5, 11-14; 3:3-5; 4:8-11, 21-31; 5:1-4; 6:12-15). Keller summarizes their doctrine this way, "[These] teachers...told these young Christians that their performance mattered. Of course they needed to trust Christ and His death; and then, if they wanted truly to be acceptable to God, they needed to get circumcised and get on with keeping God's laws. Their efforts were what mattered."¹ He further explains the implications of this: "By insisting on Christ-plus-anything-else as a requirement for full acceptance by God, these teachers were presenting a whole different way of relating to God (a 'different gospel,' 1:6) from the one Paul had given them ('the one we preached,' 1:8)."² These Judaizers were furthermore undermining Paul's apostolic authority in order to strengthen their own position.

Kent argues convincingly that problems concerning "the relation of Gentile converts to the Mosaic Law" were a natural issue in light of the Jewishness of the first converts.³ However, these false teachers had refused to be instructed in this area and were corrupting truth with

deception, and Paul's evaluation of their "different way of relating to God" is clear: "[Their] heresies [were] so serious that Paul denies to their doctrine the name gospel (1:7)."⁴ Furthermore, Paul makes it clear that they "acted out of false motives: that is, out of personal ambition (cf. 4:17; 6:13) and out of offense at the cross of Christ (6:12)."⁵ Finally, Paul tells us in Romans 3:20 that the false gospel of Christ plus works leads to condemnation, not salvation.

Paul's burden in this letter, then, is to demonstrate theologically and practically that "their spiritual problem is not only caused by *failing* to live in obedience to God, but also by *relying on* obedience to Him."⁶ Nothing has changed. "The choice between the gospel of Christ-alone and the false gospel of Christ-plus is still one which Christians face today. Christ-plus may not look the same in our cultures as it did in Galatia. But it's still an attractive message, a flattering view, and a subtle reversal of the true gospel...and so it's still deadly."⁷ "The contemporary relevance of Galatians," writes Vos, "is that it attacks the ever present desire of men to achieve salvation by their own efforts and the tendency of Christians to live the Christian life in their own strength or in a legalistic way."⁸

Illustration: Roughly 1500 years after the writing of this letter, the global "church" had almost entirely succumb to a "gospel" of Christ-plus. That is, until one German monk was drawn by the Lord to begin studying this little book. Through his own personal study, God would awaken the heart of Martin Luther to believe in the true gospel of grace alone through faith alone. Luther would then become a great reformer, leading true believers out from the clutches of Christ-plus-works Roman Catholicism. He later said of this little epistle, "The epistle to the Galatians is my epistle. To it I am, as it were, in wedlock. Galatians is my Katherine [the name of his wife]."

Summarizing the theological and historical importance of the message of Galatians, Merrill C. Tenney writes:⁹

Christianity might have been just one more Jewish sect, and the thought of the Western world might have been entirely pagan had it never been written. Galatians embodies the germinal teaching on Christian freedom which separated Christianity from Judaism, and which launched it upon a career of missionary conquest. It was the cornerstone of the Protestant Reformation, because its teaching of salvation by grace alone became the dominant theme of the preaching of the Reformers.

With such a foundational epistle before us, we again return to chapter 1 and remind ourselves of its challenge—***the true gospel of grace must be our priority***.

In Galatians 1:6-12, Paul uses the Greek work for gospel six times. The word itself means “good news,” but that doesn’t really do it justice. It’s more like the announcement that war is finally over. It’s the kind of news that makes people dance in the street and hug complete strangers. It’s that good.”¹⁰ In fact, we could even go so far as to say, when you hear it, “if you don’t think it’s the best news you’ve ever heard, you can be absolutely certain you’ve not understood it.”¹¹

We began to consider the content or message of this “good news” in our first lesson by studying its nature. And, indeed, from its power, provision, and particulars, we discovered that the gospel is wonderfully “good news.” However, unless it’s true, unless its source is authentic, then it’s completely valueless.

Illustration: Authenticating a piece of artwork is profoundly important for collectors. If they do not have the skills themselves to do this, or if they fail to employ the services of a professional, they may discover too late that they wasted money on a fake. Authenticating artwork is a complex, yet vital industry. A work that looks exactly like a Rembrandt, but is discovered to have been forged, is immediately discarded as worthless. But, even the dustiest painting, uncovered in the least likely of places, it immediately lauded as a treasure if its Rembrandt signature is proven to be authentic.

The label “authentic” is important in art, clothing (i.e., Nike), accessories (i.e., Coach), and watches (i.e., Rolex). And, it is certainly important for all religious messages and methods that want to be labeled gospel or “good news.” If they cannot be proven to be from God, then they are mere fakes, and those who profess them are frauds.

In Galatians 1:6-12, Paul picks up the gospel that he had preached to the Galatian churches and turns it over, as it were, and there he shows us the authenticating label, “Made and Revealed by God” (cf. “gospel of Christ,” v. 7). This gospel—the gospel of grace alone—is divine and true. And so, an analysis of its nature (1:1-5) and source (1:6-12) convinces us that it really is “good news”—indeed, it’s “the best news we’ve ever heard.”

Since the source of Paul’s gospel is of God, ***the gospel of grace must be our priority***. Paul has four primary points about how the gospel is revealed to humanity generally and to individual people.

GOD REVEALS THE GOSPEL (vv. 11-12) — UNIVERSAL.

Paul affirms in verse 11, “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel.” We could literally translate this verse, “I make known [or, certify] to you [or, in the vernacular, ‘let me make it perfectly clear’], brothers, that the gospel that was gospelsed by me is not according to man.” MacArthur suggests that Paul’s message itself demonstrated that it was not human in its origin:

Had Paul proclaimed a gospel that was according to man, it would have been permeated by works righteousness, as is every humanly devised system of religion. Man’s sinful pride is offended by the idea that only God’s mercy and grace can save him from sin, and he therefore insists on having a part in his own salvation. The very fact that Paul preached a message of salvation in which works play absolutely no part was itself evidence that his message was from God and not ... man.¹²

Paul further explains in verse 12 what he means by “not according to man”—he “did not receive it from any man, nor was [he] taught it.” In other words, Paul didn’t get the gospel from someone like something that might be purchased, nor did he learn it from someone as a student. These phrases are noteworthy for two reasons: (1) this is directed against the Pharisees, who in their humanly understanding had created a system of interpretations, practices, and ceremonies that was their standard and had “made void the Word of God” (Matthew 15:6); (2) Paul himself had been a well-trained Pharisee who learned many religious traditions and interpretations (cf. v. 14), but he denies any such humanly wisdom as his instructor relative to his gospel message (Acts 22:3; 23:6; 26:5). Remember that Paul had affirmed the same divine origin of his personal commission in verse 1, stating that his apostolic calling (like his gospel) was not “from” man, nor was he appointed “through” or by man.

Instead, Paul clarifies that he “received [his gospel message] through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (v. 12). Prior to his Damascus Road

experience, Paul undoubtedly knew and could have explained many of the tenants of the gospel message, but he had not believed them and had instead rejected them as heretical (cf. v. 13). But, when Jesus Christ revealed Himself to Paul in a supernatural way (Acts 9:1-16), he believed the truth of the gospel and received Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Today, God's gospel-revelation is total and complete, and it is available for everyone (Matthew 24:14; Colossians 1:23), for it comes through God's Word (Romans 10:14-17; 2 Timothy 3:15; James 1:18, 21)—in the Bible, God has revealed His desire and ability to rescue us by grace alone! From its first hint in Genesis 3:15 to its great exposition in Romans, God has been revealing His gospel of grace, and whenever God's Word is proclaimed, God's gospel truth is being generally revealed and offered to all who are listening (cf. Titus 2:11).

GOD DRAWS PEOPLE TO THE GOSPEL (v. 6) — INDIVIDUAL.

Divine revelation is more personally applied for those who believe. Like for Paul, on the day we received the gospel message, God was making it clear to us (cf. Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 3:14-17; Isaiah 55). These Galatian believers had themselves experienced this specific dimension of God's revealing work—it wasn't as miraculous or experiential as Paul's unique story, but it was just as supernatural and gracious. Paul writes that God had "called [them] in [or, by] the grace of Christ." The Bible clearly teaches that God mercifully chose believers in eternity past to be rescued, and in time He graciously called them and began drawing them to Himself (cf. Romans 8:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; 2 Timothy 1:8-9; 1 Peter 1:15). And, because God had effectively called them, these believers eventually "received" the gospel (v. 9; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-3). This is the testimony of every born-again believer "in Christ"—we chose Christ and received the gospel, for God had already chosen us and called us. Therefore, both the content of this message and its revelation to our own hearts is grace!

Since that's true, we can now understand why Paul is so "astonished" that the Galatian believers were "so quickly deserting" Christ and His gospel of grace. In fact, Paul says that they were (lit.) "deserting to another [Gk. *heteros*] gospel, which is not another [Gk. *allos*]" (vv. 6b-7a). The Greek word *heteros* refers to "another of a different kind," while *allos* refers to "another of the same kind." In other words, in turning to another quote-unquote gospel, they were going to something

altogether different—it was no longer "good news," but bondage! See, there are a lot of religious messages and methods out there, but there is "no other gospel"!

Appropriately, then, Paul is astonished and disappointed! How could you turn your back on grace for works? "It is absurd to accept a gracious salvation and then endeavor to maintain righteousness through human efforts, ceremonies, and ritual"¹³ (cf. 3:3; 4:9; 5:7)—so, how is it that these believers were doing something so absurd considering the obviously divine source of the true gospel, both in its revelation to the world and in its application to their own hearts? God was the One who called and drew them, and now they abandoning Him. How could that be?

MEN DISTORT THE GOSPEL (vv. 7-9).

Unfortunately, Paul knows the answer and gives it in verse 7—"some trouble [or, confuse] you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." False teachers from without and wolves from within were shaking up this congregation (i.e., the idea behind the word "trouble") by adding works to salvation (cf. 3:3; 4:9; 5:7), thereby "distorting" (i.e., "to cause a change in state or condition"¹⁴) it into a non-gospel.

Furthermore, we ascertain from verse 10 that these false teachers were even maligning Paul by lying about his motives and message. "The accusations against him involved the lie that he was purposely watering down the divine standard to make it easy, so that he would be popular and win the support of people weary of the hard, demanding way of legalistic Judaism. They purported that he was simply saying what men wanted to hear."¹⁵ So, they were not only preaching a false "gospel," but they were also slandering the main spokesman for the true "gospel."

The result of this chaos, confusion, and contortion (cf. Romans 16:17) was that some were, as we saw in verse 6, "deserting" Jesus Christ. To "desert" means "to have a change of mind in allegiance."¹⁶ The sober tragedy of a false "gospel" is that it is absolutely and totally deceptive—while telling people that it will bring them to Jesus Christ, it pulls them away!

Similarly, for the misguided or heartless preachers of this false "gospel," there is only damnation or a "curse." And their history or standing

doesn't matter—the preacher may be an apparent “angel from heaven” or even the apostle Paul on a future mission trip, but if he preaches a different “gospel,” he should be accursed or literally “devoted to destruction.”¹⁷ So, both the leader and the follower in this proclamation of a false “gospel” are guaranteed destruction!

What then is the solution? How will people be protected from preachers of a false “gospel” so that they do not desert the grace of Christ? How will they be guarded from these “troublers” who deceive them with the label “gospel,” while removing anything good and gracious from it? Or, to ask it a more positive way, how will the gospel of God, universally revealed through His Word, be individually revealed to the mind and heart of those around us? The answer is closer to home than we might think.

WE MUST PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL (vv. 10-11).

In a word, we are the answer—believers who so prioritize the gospel of grace, that they proclaim it wherever they can as slaves to this mission, rejecting the pressure of man. Yes, God has universally revealed gospel truth in His Word, and when that is heard and God reveals it to the individual heart, its message of grace powerfully delivers and delights. That is what Paul references when he states in Romans 10:17, “Faith comes from hearing...the Word of Christ.” But, then we must ask the logical question that Paul also asks in that passage, “How are they to hear without someone preaching” (v. 14)? See, God uses means in the ministry of revealing His gospel to individuals, and we are those means.

As we saw in verses 1-5, this was the focus that God had given to Paul through the gospel, and he had given himself to this mission of preaching the gospel of grace to the lost (cf. v. 8, 11, 23). Likewise, Christ commissions all followers of His with this focus. Just before His ascension, He charged, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8). For the gospel to be revealed to individuals, we must proclaim it!

Remember what is on the line here: a curse! Those who abandon the gospel of grace, fail to give allegiance to Christ and are accursed,

destined for destruction. Do you get that? Does that grip you? It did Paul, insofar as his breaking heart yearns this way in Romans 9:3—“I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of [the lost].” What an example! What a priority on the gospel!

Additionally, remember how the false teachers were attacking Paul's character by suggesting that he was the one in error, watering down a divine standard in order to win a following? Well, Paul defends himself in verse 10 by showing how unconcerned he has been about pleasing people. In light of the strict “no other gospel” standard he has just held all gospel-preachers to, including himself, in verses 8-9,¹⁸ he obviously doesn't care what people think about him in his gospel ministry. The word “for” heading verse 10 could be translated “there” to convey his attitude.¹⁹ It's as if he says, “There! Does that sound like I am a people-pleaser? Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?” Paul had committed himself, as one of his favorite self-descriptors confirms, to being “a servant [lit. slave] of Christ.” His opponents could assign to him whatever false motives and message they wanted (and sometimes, even true gospel preachers tried to hurt him in this way; cf. Philippians 1:15, 17), and his audience could reject and persecute him as many did when he preached in Galatia (cf. 4:13; Acts 13:49-50; 14:1-7, 19-22)—but none of that would deter him from his focus on serving Christ and winning God's approval through preaching the gospel!

Illustration: Wiersbe writes:

When Verdi produced his first opera in Florence, the composer stood by himself in the shadows and kept his eye on the face of one man in the audience—the great Rossini. It mattered not to Verdi whether the people in the hall were cheering him or jeering him; all he wanted was a smile of approval from the master musician.²⁰

The same was true for Paul—neither man's approval nor disapproval, man's acceptance nor rejection, man's praise nor persecution, man's support nor slander moved Paul. Instead, as he wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:9, “[I] make it [my] aim to please Him.” Paul's priority was honoring God by proclaiming “no other gospel” than the message of grace that he had received, and no one would deter him from that. “But none of these things move me [i.e., ‘imprisonment and afflictions,’ v. 23], neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24 KJV).

Paul stands as a stunning example to us of one who gave himself to the proclamation of the gospel, not only out of a loving burden for the lost who still needed to receive it, but also out of a loyal commitment to his Master who had graciously revealed it to him.

Application: In light of what we have learned about the source of the gospel (that God reveals it, draws people to it, grieves to see false teachers distorting it, and sends disciples to proclaim it), we must prioritize the gospel in our lives! Are you? (1) Have you believed and received the gospel in saving faith? Are you trusting Jesus Christ to be your rescuer from sin, applying to your life all the particulars of this “good news” that we saw in verses 1-5? (2) Are you proclaiming the gospel? Are you burdened for the lost who are laboring under the curse of sin without the Savior? Do you yearn for them to learn the truth just as God revealed it to you? Are you ignoring the evaluations of others because you are concerned only for God’s approval? And are you knowing God’s pleasure upon your gospel-centered, gospel-proclaiming life? Let these questions show you where you are failing to focus on the gospel, and let the divine source of the gospel strengthen you to prioritize it once again.

CONCLUSION

The gospel of grace belongs to God. Its announcement of “good news” bears His authenticating signature. Indeed, He made it and revealed it. Friends, this is “the best news we’ve ever heard” and it is from God—let us, then, prioritize it by proclaiming it.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Timothy Keller, *Galatians: Gospel Matters* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p. 5.

² Timothy Keller, *Galatians for You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p. 11.

³ Homer Kent Jr., *The Freedom of God’s Sons* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1976), pp. 13-14.

⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1953), p. 15.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Keller, *Galatians for You*, p. 9. Regarding the sections in 5:13-26 and 6:7-8 that deal with “certain libertinistic tendencies” Kent writes, “In Galatians 5:13... those who have comprehended the truth that believers are free from the law are cautioned not to go to the opposite extreme and throw off all restraints. The thrust of the epistle, therefore, may be seen as directed basically to one group, who needed instruction as well as a cautioning against leaving the path of truth for either extreme” (Kent, pp. 24-25.).

⁷ Keller, *Galatians: Gospel Matters*, p. 5.

⁸ Howard Vos, *Galatians: A Call to Christian Liberty* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 8.

⁹ Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), p. 15.

¹⁰ Rico Tice, *Christianity Explored* video series, Session 1: “Good News” (Christianity Explored Ministries: 2012), www.christianityexplored.org.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 23.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 641.

¹⁵ MacArthur, 22.

¹⁶ Arndt, 642.

¹⁷ Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2000).

¹⁸ This was a standard that he had always held, for his phrase “as we have said before, so now I say again” refers to what he had said on one of his previous visits.

¹⁹ MacArthur, 22.

²⁰ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 685.