

GALATIANS

Lesson 2

The One True Gospel Galatians 1:6-10

INTRODUCTION

God has appointed us to live in the most theologically confused generation in the history of the church. In America alone there are over 240 denominations and all are claiming that their group has the truth. Some of these groups disagree as to the method or way of salvation in the Christian religion. Who do we believe? Which group is right? What is our authority?

The answers to these questions are found in Galatians 1: 6-10. In these verses the Apostle Paul defends the true gospel against the Judaizers, who claimed to be Christians but were teaching a false gospel of salvation by law-works.

It is interesting to note that Paul has no praise of thanksgiving for the Galatians. He hits them with hard truth right from the beginning. Why? He wants them to know that this is no mere philosophical discussion or theological debate but it was an issue where peoples' souls were at stake.

THE FAITHLESS GALATIANS 1:6

“I am astonished”

Paul was utterly amazed that these Christians could be so quickly taken away from the true gospel and go after a false gospel of salvation in his absence.

This verse tells us that it is possible for “born again” people to be swept away with error, and while we should expect it, we should never stop being astonished when it happens (Acts 20:28-32).

A man labors for a decade before he succeeds in training his little church into orderly religion, and then some ignorant and vicious poltroon comes along to overthrow in a minute the patient labor of years. . . This happy condition secured by many years of arduous labors, some lunatic might spoil in a moment.
(Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*)

“That you are so quickly deserting”

The word “deserting” means “to transfer one’s allegiance” and is used of soldiers who revolt or desert; men who change sides in war, politics or philosophy. It can mean a renegade or turncoat. These Galatians were in the process of becoming spiritual deserters from the gospel of grace. They were about to become renegades to the true gospel and turncoats for a false gospel. Some may have been on the verge of apostasy.

Apparently this defection was in progress but was not complete because Paul felt that his letter to the Galatians could win them back to the true gospel.

It is especially easy for new Christians to fall into doctrinal error. As a new Christian right out of college, I was considering two seminaries, Dallas Theological Seminary and a seminary sponsored by the Disciples of Christ in Portland, Oregon. I was impressed with a preacher in a Christian Church who suggested I go to this Disciples of Christ seminary. I was ready to go if God led me there. I visited the place and knew it was not for me. Yet, what if I had gone there? I would have been taught that salvation is by works, that water baptism and good works were necessary for salvation. I may well have become a false

teacher of the gospel. Praise God, I went to DTS, which did teach me that salvation was by grace through faith in Christ alone.

“The one who called you by the grace of Christ.”

These words are the key to understanding Paul’s concept of the gospel. The true gospel is a gospel of grace (Acts 20:24). Grace is unmerited favor. You can’t work for it, earn it or buy it.

It was God who called each individual Christian to salvation in Christ Jesus. This call is defined theologically as the effectual call of God to salvation and it always results in salvation (Rom. 8:28-30: **“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.”** And 2 Tim. 1:9: **“[God] who has saved us and called us to a holy life—not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace.”**).

This call to salvation is related to God’s sovereign purposes, and Paul always speaks of the called as those who obey the gospel by faith. Paul never speaks of a rejected effectual call. When this specific, sovereign, effectual call is given men always respond to Christ by faith. The point being that the root cause of a Christian’s salvation is God, and since God is the cause of salvation, then salvation is all of God’s grace. Since salvation is of grace, it cannot be by works.

The true gospel is a gospel of grace, which flows from a gracious God. It is the good news of a God who is gracious to undeserving, hell-bound sinners. In grace, God gave His Son to die for us. In grace, He calls us to Himself. In grace, He justifies us when we believe. The gospel of Christ is a gospel of free grace. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith in Christ alone, without any mixture of human works, acts or merits. Nothing is due to our own efforts, merits, acts or works. Everything in salvation is due to the grace of God (Eph. 2:8-9 **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”** Rom. 11:6 **“And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace.”**)

These Galatians, by going after a false gospel, were not only moving from a doctrine but from a person, the person of God who called them to salvation. To turn from the gospel of grace is to turn from the God of grace. It is impossible to forsake the gospel without forsaking God.

“And are turning to a different gospel”

These Galatians were turning to another gospel, a completely different kind of a gospel, a gospel of good works rather than a gospel of grace.

The Judaizers taught that one must have Christ AND keep the law (namely circumcision and the ceremonial law) to be saved. They felt that Moses had to finish what Christ began. They were adding to the work of Christ for salvation, which would be works rather than grace.

THE FALSE DOCTRINE OF FALSE TEACHERS 1:7

“Which is really no gospel at all.”

The false teaching of the Judaizers was no real gospel at all. The Judaizers may have called it a gospel but it was not good news of any kind. It in no way resembled the gospel of grace as taught by Jesus and the Apostles. There can only be one message of good news. The false teaching of the Judaizers was not an alternative gospel but an opposition gospel diametrically opposed to Paul’s message of grace.

Any salvation by works teaching is not the true gospel and will lead men on to the road to eternal destruction. Any salvation by works message is not good news but bad news to lost sinners. Salvation cannot be by works because the Bible says so (Tit. 3:5 **“He [God] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy.”**), and men would be deceived in trusting their works for salvation. If salvation were by works, there could never be any assurance of salvation, because one would never know what kind and how many works would really make him accepted with God.

“Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion.”

The Judaizers had agitated and shaken the Galatian Christian with their false teaching and had brought the congregations into turmoil. These false teachers were going under the guise of being Christians but were wolves in sheep’s clothing. They were fifth columnists who were guilty of spiritual subversion and sedition.

“And are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

The Judaizers were not just perverting or twisting the gospel of grace but were reversing it to make it by works. There simply is no compatibility between works and grace in salvation.

There are many substitutions, perversions and distortions of the true gospel in our day.

Substitutions. There are blatant substitutions for the true gospel. In spiritual matters, 99% grace and 1% works equals works. Some tell us that salvation is belonging to a certain group, namely their particular church, denomination or organization. They say you need Christ AND their church. This is works! Still others teach that you cannot be saved unless you keep the Sabbath, which is Saturday for them. This is works. Still others teach that salvation is in fasting, indulgences, sacraments, penance and confession. This is works! Liberals would tell us that salvation is by good works, especially social good works, and the death of Christ is unnecessary for the salvation of a man. This is works! Still others teach five steps to salvation: faith, repentance, confession, water baptism and good works. This is works!

Notice carefully that these works systems are due to a lack of understanding that salvation is all of grace. If it is of grace, then it cannot be by works. Most heretical teachings begin because men do not begin salvation with the grace of God.

Perversions. There are also perversions of the gospel of grace. When Satan cannot get people to deny grace, he gets them to mix it with works in a subtle way, or he gets them to emphasize one truth over another. Those who hold to perversions can be believers but they are swept away with false teaching.

There is a great tendency among evangelists to credit a man’s salvation to his own free will. They declare that it is man’s free will that is the final cause in salvation. If this is the case, then the act of the will becomes a work and this denies that salvation is by grace (Eph. 2:8; **“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith.”**). Grace must be the final cause in man’s salvation or salvation is by merits, acts, efforts or works.

There is also the subtle temptation among those who understand that salvation is by grace alone to de-emphasize man’s responsibility to believe. The scriptures teach that salvation is by grace (cause) through faith (means). Both God’s sovereign grace and man’s need to exercise faith in Christ are taught in scripture. A man must believe in Christ by an act of the will to be saved, but behind that act of the will is the grace of God or salvation would be by works. Even faith is a gift from God, but God does not exercise faith for us. We exercise faith by God’s grace.

Distortions. There are also distortions of the gospel which slyly take men from really understanding that salvation is by grace through faith. Trust Christ and walk an aisle; trust Christ and raise your hand; trust Christ and sign a card. These things leave man with the impression that he must do something in the salvation process. Another is pray a prayer to receive Christ. Salvation is always by grace through faith in Christ. Man can only respond to Christ for salvation through faith and even that faith is a

gift from God. The Bible is clear. We do not do any works to be saved. We simply trust in Christ by receiving His free gift of salvation to us.

THE FATE OF FALSE TEACHERS 1:8-9

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”

Paul declared that there is only one message of good news, the gospel of grace, and if any human being, or spiritual being, or if he or his companions preached any other gospel, they should be eternally condemned. Strong words!

The word translated “eternally condemned” is the Greek word *anathema*, which speaks of a divine ban or curse of God. These false teachers were to be set aside for divine destruction. Notice Paul did not pronounce a curse on these Judaizers, but it was his desire that they should be damned. Why did Paul use such strong, caustic language? Because these false teachers were leading multitudes of people to accept a salvation by works which would ultimately lead to their destruction.

How do you think Paul would feel about the false teachings of our day? Would he tolerate the gospel which is being preached by many evangelicals today? He would not! Why? Because the souls of men are at stake. He would be more concerned about preaching truth than filling up churches with bodies.

“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”

Paul said there is only one gospel and that is the gospel preached by the Lord Jesus and the Apostles. Therefore the norm or criterion by which all systems or opinions of salvation are to be tested is the primitive gospel, the gospel of grace, which Jesus and the Apostles preached and is now recorded for us in the New Testament. Any other system, opinion or gospel contrary to that of Christ and the Apostles is false doctrine, and the curse and condemnation of God.

Notice Paul was not wishing infidels, agnostics and atheists should be condemned for false teaching, but men who claimed to be Christians. The Judaizers believed in Christ but believed in law-works as a cause of salvation. Anyone who rejects the true gospel and teaches a false gospel is to be rejected. These false teachers may be worldly scholars, university professors, seminary professors, dignified clergymen, archbishops or the pope himself. If they bring a gospel other than the gospel preached by the Apostles and recorded in the New Testament, it is to be rejected and so are false teachers to be rejected.

THE FAITHFULNESS OF PAUL 1:10

“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men?”

Paul came under much criticism from the Judaizers, for they accused him of taking a soft line on the gospel. They felt he left out an essential part of the gospel which was the keeping of the law. They were saying Paul made the gospel easy to accept because men did not have to work to be saved. Paul never denied works, but taught that works were never the cause of salvation but always the result of having been saved.

“If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Paul was first and foremost a servant or slave of Christ, and he always preached the gospel to please his Lord and not to please men. No preacher of the gospel of grace can please both God and men at the same time. One must preach the gospel of grace in such a way that the message of grace is not watered down and man’s responsibility to believe in Christ is not minimized. To faithfully proclaim the gospel, one

must preach sin, judgment, hell, the cross, faith, repentance and above all the grace of God, which makes salvation possible.

The gospel of God's grace never has been and never will be popular with the world but it is popular with Christ and with His people who love the doctrines of grace.

No man can say that we are seeking the favor and praise of men with our doctrine. We teach that all men are naturally depraved. We condemn man's free will, his strength, wisdom, and righteousness. We say there is no good in us to deserve God's grace. We say that we obtain grace by the free mercy of God alone for Christ's sake. This is no preaching to please men. This sort of preaching procures for us the hatred and disfavor of the world, persecutions, excommunication, murders, and curses.

To this day you will find many who seek to please men in order that they may live in peace and security. They teach whatever is agreeable to men, no matter whether it is contrary to God's Word or their own conscience. But we who endeavor to please God and not men, stir up hell itself. We must suffer reproach, slanders, and death. (Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*).

CONCLUSION

For you here this morning without Christ, I want to ask you a simple question. "If you were to die right now what are you trusting to get yourself to heaven?" If you reply your good works, you will never make it, for all of our human righteousness are as filthy rags before a holy God. What kind and how many good works must you have to be accepted by God? No, your good works will simply condemn you because you are a sinner who needs to be saved by the pure grace of God.

Salvation has already been provided for sinners in Christ, and all who trust Christ are recipients of God's infinite grace. If you go into eternity trusting your human works for salvation, you will only face an angry God. However, if you go into eternity trusting the work of Jesus Christ you'll be with Him for all eternity. Salvation by works results in eternal death, but salvation by grace through faith in Christ results in life eternal.