

“No Other Gospel” - Galatians 1:6–10

Brandon Holiski
Southern Oaks Baptist Church
August 23, 2026

[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please contact Southern Oaks Baptist Church through their official website, www.welovethegospel.com.]

Take a Bible and meet me in Galatians 1...

Last Sunday we saw that Paul, the author, is so full of the Gospel that he cannot get through a greeting without preaching it. In five opening verses, he told us where the Gospel comes from, what it gives, what it cost, what it accomplishes, and where all the glory goes. But today the greeting is over, and Paul does something just as striking: he sounds the alarm.

In nearly every other letter Paul writes, the greeting is followed by thanksgiving. He finds some evidence of God's grace in the church and thanks God for it. Romans, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Philemon—he tells them what he is grateful for before he tells them anything else. Even with the Corinthians, with all their chaos and immorality, get a paragraph of praise. But here, where we would expect thanksgiving, there is none. Where you would expect a blessing, Paul is going to issue a curse. Paul moves immediately from “*Amen*” in verse 5 to “*I am astonished*” in verse 6.¹

That abruptness tells us something before we have examined a single word. Some differences among Christians can be carried patiently. Some questions require humility, time, and room for disagreement. But there are other matters on which the life of the church and the eternal destiny of souls depend. When the Gospel itself is being abandoned, delay is not patience. Silence is not kindness. Paul writes like a man who smells smoke in the house and knows that people he loves are asleep upstairs.

The Galatians were not announcing that they had rejected Jesus. They were being persuaded to accept a revised message—one that still used Christian language and still made room for Jesus, but required Gentiles to add circumcision and obedience to the Law of Moses in order to belong to God. It looked like an adjustment. Paul calls it desertion. It sounded like an addition. Paul calls it distortion. And because the stakes are eternal, he pronounces God's severest judgment on those who preach it. Brace yourself. What he will say is not going to sound tolerant. It will not sound restrained. Paul is like a parent who sees his child stepping off the curb and into traffic. This is not the time to offer a balanced assessment of local traffic patterns. It's the time to holler and bring them to their senses.

But here is the burden of the passage in a nutshell: The Gospel is God's saving message, so we must not desert it, distort it, or soften it to win human approval. Let us hear God's Word together. If you are able, let me invite you to stand to your feet in recognition of the authority of God's Word over our lives. Follow along as I read Galatians 1, beginning in verse 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—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 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. 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. 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.” (Galatians 1:6–10)

This is God's Word. You may be seated...

We will follow Paul's thought through four movements today: a shocking desertion, a spurious distortion, a severe denunciation, and a singular devotion. So let's begin with...

A Shocking Desertion (6)

Paul begins, "*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ.*" His astonishment is not theatrical. He is genuinely stunned. He had entered these Galatian cities at great personal cost. He had preached Christ to them, watched them receive the Word with joy, and seen churches established. Now, after such a beginning, they are already turning away.

The words "*so quickly*" may mean that very little time had passed since Paul left them. If Galatians was written shortly after the first missionary journey, perhaps less than a year had gone by. Several commentators also hear an echo of the golden calf incident in the Old Testament. Israel had barely been delivered from Egypt and entered covenant with God when the Lord said, "*They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them*" (Exod 32:8). Moses was gone for only a matter of weeks, and they made a golden calf. Whether Paul consciously echoes that scene or not, the resemblance is sobering: recently rescued people are already reaching for another object of trust, gathering up their gold.²

But notice that Paul uses the present tense: "*you are...deserting.*" Not "you have deserted." Their departure was underway, but it was not yet complete. Paul is not writing their obituary; he is interrupting their defection. His alarm is evidence of hope. He believes a sharp warning may awaken them before they go farther.³

The word translated "*deserting*" is a military term, used of soldiers who changed sides in a war and of men who abandoned one school of philosophy for a rival one. It suggests the transferring allegiance—leaving one party for another, changing sides, becoming a turncoat.⁴ But Paul makes the offense more personal than changing schools of thought. He does not merely say, "You are deserting me" or "my doctrine." He says they are "*deserting him who called you.*" To turn from the true Gospel is to turn from the God of the Gospel.

We tend to file our beliefs in one drawer of our minds and our relationship with God in another. Doctrine over here—necessary, a little dry, mostly the pastor's department. Relationship over there—warm, personal, what really matters. But Paul will not let us compartmentalize the two. He's showing that to turn from the Gospel of grace is to turn from the God of grace. You cannot abandon the message and keep the Messenger. Later in the letter he will say it even more bluntly: "*You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace*" (Gal 5:4).

We'll come to that verse later, but the point to see now is simply that doctrine is never merely a collection of propositions floating at a safe distance from a person. The Gospel tells us who God is and how He saves. Change that message, and the god in whom you trust will eventually change with it. That is why this is not a squabble about religious technicalities. A person who says things like, "Well, I love Jesus, but I just don't accept the whole business of Him dying in my place"—that person has not kept Jesus and dropped a doctrine. He has traded the real Christ for one he has fashioned in his own image. That is, by definition, idolatry, no matter how you dress it up or if you call it Jesus.

The One who called these Galatians was God the Father, and He called them "*in the grace of Christ.*" Paul regularly uses the language of calling for God's powerful summons that brings sinners to faith. Paul doesn't use this language of "calling" like a doorbell or an invitation. In Paul's letters, when God calls, something happens. Things change.

In English, when we hear the language of "calling" we tend to think of an invitation. So let's say the Gospel is preached to a group of people, then we might think of those people as the "called," because they have been

invited to repent and believe. But while that makes sense to our English ears, Paul is not writing in English. And when you look at the way he uses this “calling” language in those contexts where he is discussing salvation—and it’s some of his favorite language—you discover that he employs it in a specific way.⁵ When God “calls,” something happens. It effects (or causes) change, which is why you will sometimes hear theologians speak of the “effectual call” of God.

We do not have time to look at every example in Paul’s writing to substantiate this (though I’ll footnote some receipts),⁶ but let me at least give you one example so you can see what I mean. In 1 Corinthians, Paul famously writes,

“For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,²³ but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,²⁴ but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” (1 Corinthians 1:22-24)

So he says that the Gospel is “*preach[ed]*” (*kyrusso*) to all (i.e., Jews and Gentiles), according to verses 22 and 23, but those who are “*called*” (*klytos*), according to verse 24, are only some of those who hear the Gospel, namely, those who receive “*Christ [as] the power of God and the wisdom of God.*” So the “*called*” are the believers, not simply the ones who hear the Gospel’s invitation.⁷ And then Paul spends the next several verses explaining the “*called*” as those whom God has “*chose[n]*” (1:26-28). That’s not my language. It’s Paul’s. And for Paul, the “*called*” are believers, born again through and through. “*And,*” as he tells the Romans, “*those whom [God] predestined he also called [same word as Gal 1:6], and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified*” (Rom 8:30).

Thus, when Paul speaks of the Galatians as those previously “*called*” by God in verse 6, he’s not questioning that they were truly believers. He knows better. They were. He witnessed it. He was there. The Galatians had not climbed toward God until He finally agreed to receive them. God had sought them, summoned them through the preaching of Christ, and brought them into the realm of grace.⁸ In short, He called them. And when He calls, it’s not into a probationary period. It’s into the unearned favor, the grace, of the one who “*deliver[s] us from the present evil age*” (Gal 1:4).

And that is what makes their desertion so irrational, so astonishing (1:5). They were not leaving a harsh master for a kinder one. They were leaving grace for a system that would place the burden back on their shoulders. The false teachers were offering circumcision, law-keeping, and membership in the Jewish covenant as a way to secure what God had already given freely in Christ. They were turning from gift to wages, from Christ’s sufficiency to their own performance, from the God who called them to a system in which they would have something to claim.

We should feel Paul’s astonishment because our hearts remain prone to the same exchange. Most of us will not formally renounce Christianity. Desertion almost never feels like desertion. It feels like maturing. We are more likely to retain Christian words while shifting the practical basis of our confidence. We begin to believe God receives us because we have had a disciplined week. Or we assume He keeps His distance because we have failed. Or maybe we err on the other side: we compare ourselves with someone whose sins seem worse and use the comparison to feel secure. In each case, we’re acting as though we begin with Christ, then quietly ask our morality, knowledge, service, political faithfulness, parenting, or doctrinal precision to help hold us in God’s favor.

Good things become a different gospel when we make them the ground of our acceptance with God. And that shift never remains theoretical. A performance gospel will make you proud when you think you are succeeding and desperate when you know you are not. It will teach you to hide, compare, boast, and despair. The grace of Christ does the opposite: it strips us of every boast, gives us a righteousness we did not achieve, and teaches us to obey from acceptance rather than for it.

So do not only ask, “Have I left the Christian faith?” Ask, “What am I presently relying on?” What makes you think God will receive you today? What do you point to when your conscience accuses you? The Galatians’ movement was not finished. Perhaps yours is not either. The warning of verse 6 is God’s gracious interruption: do not keep drifting. Return to the God who called you in the grace of Christ.

That desertion was shocking. But it did not happen in a vacuum. Verse 7 turns from the people being swayed to the message and messengers swaying them.

A Spurious Distortion (7)

Paul says they are turning to *“a different gospel—not that there is another one.”*⁹ He clarifies the phrase almost as soon as he uses it. There are not several legitimate gospels sitting on a shelf, and the Galatians happened to choose a less helpful version. There is one Gospel. Everything contrary to it is not an alternative form of good news; it is no good news at all.¹⁰

What was this counterfeit? The rest of the letter makes it plain. These teachers did not deny that Jesus was the Messiah. They did not tell the Galatians to burn their Bibles and return to pagan temples. They insisted that faith in Christ was not enough—that Gentiles must also be circumcised and come under the Law of Moses to be fully included among God’s people. Their message was not Christ instead of Moses, or Moses instead of Christ. It was Christ plus Moses as the basis of acceptance with God.¹¹

That is why the error was persuasive. Counterfeits work because they resemble what is real. The most dangerous false gospels borrow Christian vocabulary. They speak of Jesus, faith, salvation, holiness, and the Bible. They may affirm much that is true. But then they add, subtract, or rearrange something at the center. Christ is honored but not treated as sufficient. Grace is mentioned but not allowed to be free. Faith is required but made incomplete without some human achievement.

Paul identifies *“some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”* The word for “trouble” can describe agitation, inward turmoil, or confusion. It means “to shake up.”¹² These teachers were not leading the churches into deeper peace and holiness. They were unsettling consciences and dividing congregations. They were not calmly presenting an alternative. They were making frightened Christians wonder whether they were really in. The word *“distort”* is stronger still. It was used for turning something into its opposite—light into darkness, joy into mourning, drinkable water into blood. The teachers may have described their work as completing Paul’s message; Paul says they were reversing it.¹³

That gives us a necessary test. We do not evaluate teaching merely by asking whether it is sincere, inspiring, traditional, popular, or peppered with Bible verses. We ask what it does with the Gospel of Christ. Who is Jesus? What has He accomplished? What is wrong with us? How can sinners be right with God? Is Christ’s obedience, death, and resurrection sufficient and received by faith, or must something else complete His work?

And the danger is not only located in obvious cults or distant religions. Paul’s opponents operated close to the church and knew how to speak its language. A church can say “Gospel” constantly while replacing it with moral improvement, political victory, therapeutic comfort, social respectability, doctrinal tribalism, or a method for personal success. None of those things can reconcile sinners to God. Some may be good fruits or legitimate concerns in their place, but they become destroyers when they occupy the center.

The Gospel does produce obedience, but obedience is its fruit, not its root or rival. The Gospel creates a people zealous for holiness, but holiness does not purchase our place among them. We must distinguish the root from the fruit, the foundation from the house, the ground of acceptance from the life that follows. When we confuse them, the good news becomes bad advice, something like: “Jesus has done His part; now you do your part and make yourself worthy.” Paul will not permit that sentence to survive.

And that is the key to this whole letter, so let me put it as plainly as I can. The Gospel has an order to it. God accepts you, and therefore you obey. Every other religion on earth reverses it: you obey, and therefore God accepts you. The false teachers in Galatia were not deleting grace. They kept the word. They simply moved it to the end of the sentence.¹⁴

Which means you can tell a great deal about a church, or about your own heart, not by whether the word “grace” is present, but by where it sits. Do you obey because you are accepted? Or are you obeying in order to become accepted? Same actions. Same vocabulary. Opposite religions. Grace has become a wage and Jesus an assistant.¹⁵

Brothers and sisters, you have to understand that the most dangerous message you will ever hear will not come from someone who claims to hate Jesus. It will come from someone who says His name warmly, opens the same Bible, and tells you there is more. John Chrysostom, preaching this passage in the fourth century, said this is precisely the devil’s craft. Had they said, “Depart from Christ,” the Galatians would have run them out of town. Instead they left all the familiar words in place and quietly tunneled underneath the building. The old vocabulary was the awning they worked under.¹⁶

And we are not immune. We are surrounded by messages that use our vocabulary. A gospel of prosperity, in which Jesus is the way to financial security. A gospel of family values, in which He is the way to a well-behaved household. A gospel of self, in which He is the way to feeling whole. A gospel of respectability, in which He is the way to be the kind of person your neighbors approve of.¹⁷

Notice how hard these are to refuse, because the things they offer are genuinely good. It is good to have a stable income is good. It is good to have a peaceful home. But none of that is the good news, and when one of them quietly becomes the point, we have not enriched the Gospel. We have replaced it. And, thereby, we have emptied it.

The Galatians were being troubled by such a distorted message. And Paul now turns toward anyone who would preach such a thing, and his language becomes more severe than we may be comfortable hearing.

A Severe Denunciation (8–9)

Verse 8 says, *“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.”* Notice first whom Paul includes: “even if we.” He places himself beneath the message he delivered. He does not say the Gospel is true because Paul preaches it. Paul preaches it because the risen Christ revealed it, and Paul himself remains accountable to it.

That means Christian truth is not finally established by the personality, reputation, education, platform, or apparent success of the messenger. The messenger is judged by the message. If Paul returned to Galatia and contradicted the Gospel he first preached, the churches were to reject the later Paul. If the pastor who baptized you, the teacher who helped you understand Scripture, or the leader whose ministry has blessed thousands begins to alter the Gospel, gratitude for past ministry must not become permission for present error. No personality is too beloved, no office too impressive, and no ministry too fruitful to be tested by the apostolic Word.¹⁸

Then Paul moves from the highest imaginable human messenger to a heavenly one: *“or an angel from heaven.”* Most likely, this is deliberate exaggeration. There is no clear evidence that the teachers in Galatia claimed an angel had given them their message. Paul reaches for the most dazzling authority his hearers could imagine and says, “The Gospel still stands above the messenger.” A supernatural experience does not authenticate a contradictory message. Angels do not get to revise what God has accomplished and announced in Christ.¹⁹

That principle has obvious apologetic force. Islam and Mormonism both appeal to later revelations associated with angelic messengers—Islam to the angel Gabriel, and Mormonism to an angel named Moroni. But both proclaim a message that contradicts the true Gospel. Paul answered both of these religions before either one even existed—and he did it, therefore, without knowing a single thing about them. He didn’t need to. That is exactly the point. You never test a message by the spender of the messenger. You test the messenger by the message. Let’s not forget that Paul will later write that “*even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light*” (2 Cor 11:14). So we should speak to Muslim and Latter-day Saint neighbors with respect, affection, and genuine interest in them as people made in God’s image. But kindness does not require us to pretend that contradictory messages can both be true. Paul gives us the order: we do not revise the Gospel because someone claims an angelic source; we test every claimed revelation by the Gospel God has already given.²⁰

The same principle applies closer to home. Not every threat comes with an angel. Sometimes it comes with an intuition: “I know what Scripture says, but I feel that God told me...” Sometimes it comes with credentials, charisma, an enormous audience, or stories of remarkable results. Experiences must be tested. Impressions must be tested. Traditions must be tested. Preachers must be tested. Even our own most settled assumptions must be tested. And they are tested by God’s objective Word, not your subjective feelings. The apostolic Gospel is not clay in the church’s hands. It is the trust placed into the church’s care.

Then comes the sentence we might wish Paul had softened: “*let him be accursed.*” The Greek word is *anathema*. Its Old Testament background is something placed under God’s ban and devoted to destruction. In this context Paul is not merely saying, “I strongly disagree,” or even, “Remove him from the teaching schedule.” He is declaring that anyone who persists in preaching a false gospel stands under God’s curse and faces His final judgment.²¹

We need two cautions. First, this is not permission for cruelty, harassment, violence, or personal vengeance. Perhaps this reminder is needed more today, in the age of Facebook and X: Pronouncing people accursed should not be the private hobby of individual Christians, despite what you may have seen in a comment section of your social media feed. Guarding the doctrine of a church is entrusted to her elders, and it is a sober enough task that no one should want it.²² And even then, we distinguish the heresy from the heretic. “We are called to speak the truth in love, not to shout the faith in anger.”²³ Nevertheless, the church must guard the flock, reject the contrary message, and refuse to recognize an unrepentant false teacher as a faithful Christian guide. But final condemnation belongs to the Judge of all the earth. So Paul places the false teacher in God’s hands.

A second caution follows: we should not borrow Paul’s severity for every disagreement. Christians may disagree about the timing of Christ’s return, the details of church government, the proper application of disputed matters, or the best explanation of a difficult verse while remaining brothers and sisters. Paul does not pronounce a curse because someone has a different opinion from him. He does it because people are corrupting the only message by which sinners can be saved. We must learn both forms of faithfulness: charity where Scripture permits disagreement and courage where the Gospel is denied.

Why is Paul so severe? Because a false gospel does not merely make a theological chart less accurate. It directs sinners away from their only Savior. Imagine a physician replacing the only effective antidote with a bottle that bears the same label but contains something powerless. Severity toward that deception would not oppose love; it would express love for those in danger. In the same way, Paul’s anger is not wounded pride. The glory of Christ and the salvation of people are at stake.

Verse 9 repeats the warning: “*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.*” The repetition tells us this is not a burst of temper Paul regretted as soon as the words left his mouth.²⁴ He may be recalling a warning given when he was with them; at minimum, he deliberately says it again. Verse 8 imagines the impossible height of the messenger—Paul or an angel. Verse 9 turns toward the actual situation: “*If anyone is preaching to you...*” The first Gospel was what Paul preached and what the Galatians received. Novelty does not improve it.²⁵

So hear both the warning and the invitation. If you teach, lead, parent, counsel, or speak to others about God, handle the Gospel with reverent care. Do not make it harsher than God has made it by adding human requirements. Do not make it broader than God has made it by offering salvation apart from Christ. And if you know you have trusted a counterfeit, the answer is not to despair as though no grace remains. The very letter that warns you is calling you back. Leave the false refuge and receive the Christ who bore the curse for sinners.

Paul has now said something guaranteed to provoke opposition. Verse 10 explains why he is willing to say it.

A Singular Devotion (10)

Paul asks, *“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?”* His opponents may have accused him of making conversion too easy for Gentiles because he was a people-pleaser. By not requiring circumcision, they could say, Paul had trimmed the message to attract an audience. Paul points to the paragraph we have just read. Does a man seeking universal approval speak this way? Whatever else we may say about verses 8 and 9, they are not the words of a man trying to manage his approval rating. His willingness to pronounce God’s judgment on false teaching is evidence that popularity is not his master.²⁶

But we must understand what Paul is not saying. He is not teaching that Christians should be needlessly abrasive, delighted to offend, or suspicious of every compliment. Elsewhere Paul says that he seeks to please others for their good so that they may be saved (1 Cor 9:19-23). Love considers how words will land. Wisdom chooses the right tone and time. Gentleness is fruit of the Spirit. The issue is not whether we care about people; it is whether their approval controls our obedience.²⁷

There is a kind of people-pleasing that looks like love but is really fear. It refuses to tell the truth because we cannot bear being disliked. It laughs at what dishonors Christ because we do not want to seem strange. It changes convictions depending on the room. It avoids needed correction, stays silent when a friend is walking toward danger, and edits the Gospel so no one will feel confronted by sin or called to repentance.

There is another kind that looks bold but is still controlled by people. A preacher can avoid unpopular truths to keep one audience, or exaggerate every controversy to excite another. There is a type of person who seems to operate as though our faithfulness is measured by how many people we offend. There are people who mistake being disagreeable with being faithful, who collect enemies like trophies. But deep down they too are actually being controlled by the approval of others, it’s just their own preferred crowd. These are all forms of bondage because human reaction determines the message.

Paul gives the alternative: *“If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”* Don’t forget who Paul was. Saul of Tarsus was a young man on a fast track, admired by everyone whose admiration he wanted.²⁸ Once upon a time, he lived for that approval. If applause had been his aim now, he already had it. He did not lose the crowd by accident; he traded it. For what? For service to Christ.

But the word translated *“servant”* is stronger than an occasional volunteer. Paul calls himself Christ’s slave—a man owned by Another, responsible to Another, and available for Another’s purposes. A slave cannot have two masters issuing final orders. Paul may listen to criticism, learn from others, and adapt himself in matters where truth is not compromised. But there is only one verdict he cannot live without: the approval of Christ.

That singular devotion is costly, but it is also freeing. If everyone must approve of you, you will have as many masters as there are people in the room. Their expectations will conflict, their praise will shift, and their criticism will exhaust you. Serving Christ gathers a scattered life around one center. You can repent when you are wrong because your image is not your lord. You can remain steady when you are misunderstood because

public opinion is not your judge. You can speak hard truth gently and receive praise humbly because neither rejection nor applause owns you.

Ask yourself: Whose displeasure frightens me enough to make me disobey Christ? Whose approval am I tempted to purchase with silence, compromise, exaggeration, or pretense? The answer may identify a functional master. Jesus is kinder than that master and more worthy of your devotion. He does not call us to stop loving people. He frees us to love them honestly, without using their approval to support the weight of our identity.

The church needs that freedom. We will not preserve the Gospel through natural courage, argumentative personalities, or delight in controversy. We will preserve it as servants whose loyalty belongs to Christ. Singular devotion to Him produces both a firm spine and a tender heart: unwilling to change His message, and willing to spend ourselves for the people who need to hear it.

Conclusion

So put it back together. A desertion that astonished Paul. A distortion that reversed the Gospel. A denunciation as severe as anything in the New Testament. And a devotion that made him willing to say it.

But I do not want us to leave with that word “accursed” ringing in our ears, because it is not the last thing Galatians has to say about a curse. Paul will use it again. In chapter 3 he writes, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.’*” (3:13).²⁹ Do you see it? The curse Paul pronounces in chapter 1 is the curse Christ absorbed in chapter 3. He knows exactly what he is invoking in verse 8, because he has stood at the foot of a cross and watched the Son of God be made a curse in his place.

That is why Paul cannot tolerate an addition to this Gospel. Not because he is rigid. Because he has seen what it cost. Christ does not save by lowering God’s holiness, pretending sin is small, or asking us to complete what He lacked. He bears the judgment His people deserve and gives them the righteousness they do not possess. If you add your works as part of the basis of acceptance, you do not improve that rescue. You deny that Christ truly bore the curse and finished the work. Paul’s denunciation is severe because Christ’s cross is sufficient. When someone says that Christ’s work plus your effort is what saves you, they are standing in front of a cross where the Son of God absorbed the curse of God, and they are saying it was not quite enough.

But if Christ became a curse for us, there is nothing left to add, and every addition says the cross came up short. And this is why arguably the fiercest passage in Paul’s letters is finally a passage about mercy. The God who curses false gospels and their peddlers is the God who took the curse upon Himself.

So let me speak to two kinds of people this morning.

If you have never trusted Christ, understand what is being offered and what is not. You are not being invited to improve yourself. You are not being asked to clean yourself up and then come. The curse your sin deserves has already fallen—on Him, on a Roman cross, outside a city wall. There is no other gospel, and you do not need one. Turn from your sin and put your whole weight on Jesus Christ in faith, and the verdict of God over your life will be the verdict He has already spoken over His Son.

And if you belong to Christ, you will be tempted this week to reverse the order—to live as though His acceptance of you tracks your performance, instead of Christ’s. You’ll be tempted to trim what you believe to keep a room comfortable. When you feel that pull, come back here. Come back to a Savior who hung under the curse rather than let you carry it. Stop wandering. And remember that more real than any of our wandering is the faithfulness of God.³⁰ Peter was never more than a whisker from disaster, and Jesus said to him, “*I have*

prayed for you that your faith may not fail.” Christ still prays. The warnings in this letter are not here to make you doubt whether He will hold you. They are one of the ways He holds you.

There is no other Savior. There is no other name. There is no other Gospel. And, brothers and sisters, there does not need to be.

Let’s pray...

¹ There was a first-century teacher named Quintilian who was considered a master of proper style. He taught that no sane man begins by shouting; he begins courteously and wins his audience before pressing his case. Quintilian would have failed Paul for this letter. Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2005), 15. See Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, *Institutio oratoria* 3.8.59, quoted in Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 32–33.

² Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 85; Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021), 42.

³ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 77.

⁴ Stott (*Message of Galatians*, 21–22) notes that Dionysius of Heracleia, who left the Stoics to become an Epicurean, was called ὁ μεταθέμενος, a “turncoat.” See also Harmon (*Galatians*, 39), who cites Diogenes Laërtius on one “who runs from one philosophical school to another,” and 2 Macc 7:24, where the same verb describes a Jew pressed to “turn from the ways of his fathers.”

⁵ To be clear, I am speaking of the way Paul uses this language in salvific contexts where God is the subject. So, for example, in 1 Corinthians 10:27, he speaks of a scenario where an unbeliever “*invites* [i.e., calls] *you to dinner*,” but this is not a reference to salvation or the “call” of God. Similarly, not every biblical author uses the language in exactly the same way in contexts pertaining to salvation. Matthew uses the language differently, as for example in Matthew 22:14, where Jesus says, “*For many are called [klytos], but few are chosen [eklektos]*.” Here the language of “calling” is referring to an invitation, but the point is fundamentally the same as Paul’s own. Both Jesus and Paul speak of the invitation of the Gospel going forth indiscriminately to many, but only a few being chosen (elect).

⁶ For example, Schreiner, a New Testament scholar at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary writes: “The efficacy of God’s call is a repeated theme in Pauline writings. God ‘calls into existence the things that do not exist’ (Rom 4:17 ESV). In context this refers to God’s granting Abraham and Sarah the ability to have children. He calls life into being where no ability to produce life exists. Similarly, it was God’s call that turned Paul from being a persecutor of the church to an apostle of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:13–16). In Rom 9 God’s call is closely associated with his electing work, indicating that God effectively saves (Rom 9:7, 11, 24, 25, 26). Those whom God has chosen are called to faith through the proclamation of the gospel (2 Thess 2:13–14). The God who has powerfully called believers to himself will also complete his sanctifying work (1 Thess 5:24). God’s call stands in contrast to works (Rom 9:11; 2 Tim 1:9), for human works do not and cannot save, but only the grace of God. The power of God’s call is evident, for ‘the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom 11:29 ESV).” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 85.

⁷ “It seems, then, that calling occurs *through* the proclaimed word, and yet calling is not absolutely coterminous with the word proclaimed since only *some* of those who hear the word are called. Calling, then, cannot be the same as being *invited* to be saved, for all those who hear the word preached are summoned to faith and obedience. Since calling overlaps with being chosen in this context, it seems that calling refers to God’s effective work in bringing some who hear the gospel to saving faith (cf. Rom 8:30).” Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., *Galatians*, 85–86; Moo, *Galatians*, 77.

⁹ Older interpreters sometimes built a distinction on the two Greek words Paul uses for “different” and “another.” The distinction makes a memorable sermon line, but the words often overlap in ordinary usage, so we should not make the point depend on a technical difference Paul may not have intended. His meaning is clear without it: what the Galatians are hearing is different from the apostolic Gospel and therefore has no right to bear its name. For the curious, Paul uses two Greek words for “another,” ἕτερον in v. 6 and ἄλλο in v. 7. Many interpreters take ἕτερος to mean “another of a different kind” and ἄλλος “another of the same kind”; so Timothy George, *Galatians*, Christian Standard Commentary (Holman Reference, 2020), 94; Stott, *Message of Galatians*, 26–27; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 15; and David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2014), 20. Others judge the two words to be largely synonymous in Koine Greek and warn against pressing the distinction; so Moo, *Galatians*, 78–79, 86–87; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 86; and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 81. I have rested the point on the movement of Paul’s sentence rather than on the lexical distinction, since his meaning is secure either way: he grants their message the name “gospel” and then withdraws it. Compare Timothy Keller, *Galatians*

for You, God's Word for You (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2013), 18: "Another gospel is not another gospel. It is no gospel."

¹⁰ An early Christian teacher named Theodore of Mopsuestia put it exactly that way. "Just as with royal currency—anyone who cuts off a little from the impress has debased the whole currency—so one who makes even the smallest change in sound faith adulterates the whole" (Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Epistle to the Galatians*, in M. J. Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture [Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999], 7). You do not shave a coin a little and end up with a slightly smaller coin. You end up with something that is no longer money. It does not matter that ninety-eight percent of the silver is still there. The image of the king has been defaced, and the whole thing is worthless.

¹¹ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87.

¹² The same verb (ταράσσω) appears in the Jerusalem Council's letter at Acts 15:24, where it describes men who "*troubled you with words, unsettling your minds.*"

¹³ Moo, *Galatians*, 79–80; Harmon, *Galatians*, 44; Frank Thielman, "Galatians," in *Romans–Galatians*, ed. Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar, vol. 10 of *ESV Expository Commentary* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 581. Schreiner (*Galatians*, 86) describes the word as denoting "a radical change, as of water into blood, or fresh water into salt, or feasting into mourning, or daylight into darkness."

¹⁴ Keller, *Galatians for You*, 18; Keller, "No Other Gospel," in *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* (New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013). Keller argues that the verb Paul uses for "distort" means to reverse, and that the false teachers had inverted the order of the gospel: God accepts us and then we follow Him, rather than we give God something and then He accepts us.

¹⁵ Keller, *Galatians for You*, 18.

¹⁶ John Chrysostom, *Homily on Galatians* 1.6, in Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 6.

¹⁷ Ryken, *Galatians*, 20–22. Ryken draws in part on a list by Raymond Ortlund Jr. of the substitutes that fill the space the gospel vacates.

¹⁸ Stott, *Message of Galatians*, 27–28.

¹⁹ Moo, *Galatians*, 81; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87–88; Harmon, *Galatians*, 44–46.

²⁰ Again, Paul's reference to an angel is best understood as a hypothetical that subordinates even the highest conceivable messenger to the fixed apostolic Gospel; there is no clear evidence that the Galatian agitators claimed angelic revelation. The application to later religions is therefore analogical rather than an identification of Paul's historical opponents. Philip Graham Ryken explicitly notes Islam's claim to angelic revelation and identifies Mormonism as a close counterfeit because it retains Christian terminology while proclaiming another message; see Ryken, *Galatians*, 21. See also Harmon, *Galatians*, 42–44; and Josh Moody, *No Other Gospel: 31 Reasons from Galatians Why Justification by Faith Alone Is the Only Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), "A Different Gospel." A word about using this verse in conversation: Galatians 1:8 is genuinely useful in dialogue with Muslim and Latter-day Saint friends, because it establishes the principle before the cases ever arose—a later revelation, however exalted its claimed source, cannot overturn the apostolic gospel. Two cautions attend it. First, the verse supplies a test; it does not by itself establish what the apostolic gospel is, which is the work of the rest of the letter. Second, Paul's actual targets were not outsiders with new scriptures but professing Christian brothers holding the same Bible—which is why the sermon returns at once to that point. Used chiefly as a club against outsiders, the verse loses the edge Paul gave it.

²¹ Moo, *Galatians*, 80; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87; Timothy George, *Galatians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 98–99. These commentators understand *anathema* as final divine condemnation rather than merely excommunication. Thielman instead understands Paul to be calling primarily for exclusion from fellowship in hope of eventual restoration; see Thielman, "Galatians," 582. The majority reading is followed here. Neither interpretation permits private vengeance or violence; judgment belongs to God.

²² Todd Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 32. Compare William Perkins, *Commentary on Galatians*, in *Galatians, Ephesians: New Testament*, ed. Gerald L. Bray and Scott M. Manetsch, Reformation Commentary on Scripture 10 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011), 29: "the church in cursing does but exercise a ministry, which is to publish and testify who are accursed of God.... private persons must seldom use cursing."

²³ George, *Galatians*, 108. George also cautions against "censorious personal attacks against anyone made in the image of God, however serious their theological deviations may be."

²⁴ "Lest you should think that the words came from passion or were spoken hyperbolically or through a loss of self-control, he says the same things over again." Chrysostom, *Homily on Galatians* 1.9, in Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 7.

²⁵ Moo, *Galatians*, 81–82; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 86–87; Ryken, *Galatians*, 21–22.

²⁶ Moo, *Galatians*, 83; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 88–89, 91; Harmon, *Galatians*, 49–51.

²⁷ John Piper, "When Not to Believe an Angel," sermon on Galatians 1:6–10, February 6, 1983, in *Sermons from John Piper (1980–1989)* (Minneapolis: Desiring God, 2007). Piper helpfully distinguishes sinful people-pleasing from the proper desire to please others for their salvation and edification (cf. 1 Cor 10:31–33; Rom 15:2–3).

²⁸ George, *Galatians*, 104; Ryken, *Galatians*, 24–25; John F. MacArthur Jr., *Galatians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 22.

²⁹ Moody, *No Other Gospel*. Moody links the anathema of 1:8–9 directly to Gal 3:13: "The curse has gone. Christ was cursed for you and me. He became the curse for us. He took the anathema on our behalf."

³⁰ Wilson, *Galatians*, 33: "what is even more real than apostasy is the faithfulness of God." The words of Jesus to Peter are from Luke 22:32.