

Only One Gospel Galatians 1:6-10

When Brianna and I lived in Lexington, Kentucky, especially during winter, we would take our small children to the mall where there was an indoor playground. Most of the parents would sit on the outside and watch but not me. I hovered over my little girls to protect them from future world wrestling federation children. Why? When something is valuable to you it is a natural reaction to want to protect it.

The apostle Paul was like that with the church and with the gospel.

The tone of Galatians - A polemic, a fighting epistle from beginning to end. Paul normally has a kind greeting for churches at this point in his letters but not this one because souls were at stake:

Galatians 1:6-10

“⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

Galatians 1:6-9 introduces us to the problem that led Paul to write Galatians. The one central problem that forms the backdrop for the rest of this letter is that the Galatians were in the process of turning from the one true gospel that saves to a false gospel that damns. **Galatians 1:6-9 shows us Paul's astonishment over the Galatians departing from the gospel and his anathema against anyone who devalues the gospel.** His astonishment over the Galatians for departing from the gospel and the pronouncement of a curse on anyone who devalues the work of Christ by distorting the one true message of salvation.

1. Paul's Astonishment Over People Departing From the Gospel - Galatians 1:6

Galatians 1:6 describes Paul's astonishment over people departing from the gospel. This is normally the time in Paul's letter when he writes something encouraging about the church but he has no encouragement for the Galatians. Why? Notice the words **deserting and turning** in verse 6 - When Paul wrote this letter the Galatians were personally responsible for deserting the true gospel and turning to a distorted message.

Let's read this verse again. Galatians 1:6, "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" **What astonished the apostle Paul was how quickly the Galatians departed from the gospel he had proclaimed to them.** He's astonished by it because it happened so quickly after he left. What we find in Scripture is an interesting connection between the absence of spiritual leadership and people turning back to sin. Evidently, when people are not regularly being led by spiritual leaders into truth they turn back to error and sin. Let me give you a few examples of what I'm talking about - One from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

Moses' relationship with Israel is an example. Turn back to Exodus 24. From Exodus 20-23 Moses meets with the Lord and receives the directions for how Israel is to live now that God has redeemed them from bondage in Egypt. Follow along as I read Exodus 24:3-8. After Moses gives Israel God's Word and they receive it and promise to obey it Moses returns to meet with the Lord to get more instructions. What happens after he leaves?

Look over at Exodus 32. Notice what happens when Moses leaves the people. Read Exodus 32:1-6. What happened? Moses gave Israel God's Word. Moses left. Israel, who as a nation had just pledged themselves to obey God turns from God back into sin. They hear God's Word and they know what is true and for some reason as Moses is up on the mountain spending time with the God the people are down below partying it up. **Where there is no spiritual leadership it is common for people to turn back to sin.**

Now, let's look at a New Testament example. Look at Acts 20:25-30. This is Paul's final meeting with the Ephesian elders. He is leaving and he will

never see them again. Notice what Paul tells them about what is going to happen after he leaves - Look at verses 29-30. What does Paul know is going to happen after he leaves? False teachers are going to arise from within the church speaking perverse things and people will begin turning from error to truth. When Paul leaves he knows some will turn away from the truth.

So, we see in Scripture an interesting connection, a really a scary connection, between people hearing the truth but when the truth teller leaves people turn back to sin. All of our hearts are prone to wonder. "Prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Believers need to be reminded of spiritual truth and their responsible to the truth all the time or there is a tendency to turn away from it. Hebrews 3:13-14, "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end."

Moses told people the truth, went away and people wandered into sin. Paul told the Ephesians the truth for three years and then he left and people started following perverse teaching. Paul taught the Galatians and after he left the Galatians turned from the true gospel of the grace of Christ to a distorted message. Look back at Galatians 1:6. You see the word deserting - present tense but not yet complete. **They had not fully apostasized.** True believers can never fully abandon the faith. The Galatians were drifting. But it was not yet complete.

What were they turning from and what were they turning to? They were turning from God the Father who called them through the grace of Christ and they were turning to what Paul calls a distorted message. They were deserters - Military revolt and a change of attitude. They were changing sides like traitors, turncoats. They were deserting the God of all grace. This wasn't primarily about Paul or even the message of the truth but they were deserting God Himself.

Remember what God had done for them back in verse 4 - God had delivered them and brought them into His light to live for His glory. All by His grace and all for His glory. God called them out of darkness into light blessing them infinitely and now they're turning from grace to law. FF Bruce calls it, "Religious slavery."

The end of verse 6-7 is an important reminder - “turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one.” The Judaizers brought a totally different gospel than the one Paul preached. Evidently, it was not so easy to spot at first. The Judaizers did not deny Christ. They recognized Jesus as Messiah and the importance of faith in Him. They claimed to be sent by the apostles from Jerusalem. All they did was to **add** one detail to the gospel, one work of the law, circumcision. Circumcision was commanded by Abraham. Just one small addition to the gospel done one time, not a major thing, but according to Paul adding anything to the work of Christ can lead to eternal damnation. Galatians 5:2, “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.” If someone thinks they need to add anything to the work of Christ they are believing a distorted gospel. If you are here this morning and you are trusting in something you did in addition to what Christ did for you then you are in the same position as the Galatians. That’s dangerous. That’s scary.

Let’s be clear - “To add to the gospel—whether works, sacraments, baptism, or anything else—is to detract from the gospel.” Paul moves from the his astonishment over the Galatians departure to a strong word for those who were distorting the gospel in verses 7-9. These are very very strong words for anyone who thinks tampering with the one true message of salvation is not that big of a deal.

2. Paul’s Anathema Over the People Devaluing the Gospel - Galatians 1:7-9

Galatians 1:7-9, “but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.” **Someone said that these words are the harshest words in the whole New Testament.** Paul anticipates the false teachers objection at this point.

Paul reminds the Galatians it is the message and not the messenger that matters. No authority can overrule the gospel. There gospel is true because it is from God. Look back at Galatians 1:1. Anyone who distorts the gospel is damned. That’s how serious the issue is. By changing the message from grace to works paves a road to perdition. What is Paul’s

attitude toward anyone who tampers with the gospel? Let them be damned.

That is what anathema means. Paul uses the word once in verse 8 and once in verse 9. **Anathema refers to devoting someone to destruction in eternal hell.** Again, the gospel is so important that anyone who tampers with it is anathema - hateful to God Himself. Paul was not tolerant of a false gospel. He pronounces anathema on those in Galatia who were preaching a message contrary to the one the risen Christ gave him to preach.

What is interesting is that the Judaizers had credentials that made them appear trustworthy. They claimed to have been sent by the apostles from the mother church, the church in Jerusalem. It would sort of like someone coming here with a master of divinity from what you think would be a reliable seminary and it would be easy to listen because you think the person is well trained and so they know what they're talking about.

One thing I've learned is that it is possible for people to know Greek and Hebrew and totally and completely miss the truths of Scripture. When I was serving at a church in Lexington we had a new couple at the church who was going to a seminary close by the church and I got a phone call from this guy one day asking me what I thought about women preaching in the church with men in the audience. I told him Paul writes very clearly in I Timothy 2:12 that when the church gathers together, ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."

Several days later I received an email from this guy with a paper that one of his professors had written on the topic - The guy had all kinds of greek and Hebrew throughout the paper and then he comes to the end and he says Paul didn't meant what he wrote in I Timothy 2:12 and women do have a right to preach when the local church gathers. **Education does not guarantee faithfulness to the Word of God.** If a person's message is not faithful to Scripture, especially as it relates to the gospel, that person is dangerous.

There's something else we learn here - People are not as important as the message they proclaim. Paul includes himself in this anathema. Even if Paul himself preaches another gospel he too would be devoted to

destruction. Someone told me this week that they heard on a Christian radio station from Salina, Kansas that Al Mohler said that Christians and Mormons should unite. Al Mohler is a reputable evangelical leader. Why would that it be wrong for him to say that? Mormons do not believe that Jesus is God Mormons deny what the Bible teaches about Christ. Therefore, it would be wrong for Al Mohler to tell Christians to unite with Mormons.

By the way, I don't believe he would ever do that. I went and read some articles where Al Mohler stated publicly, "As an Evangelical Christian – a Christian who holds to the "traditional Christian orthodoxy" of the Church – I do not believe that Mormonism leads to salvation. To the contrary, I believe that it is a false gospel that, however sincere and kind its adherents may be, leads to eternal death rather than to eternal life. Indeed, I believe that Mormonism is a prime example of what the Apostle Paul warned the Church to reject – "a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you" [Galatians 1:8-9]. And thus I must end where I began. Mormonism is not just another form of Christianity – it is incompatible with "traditional Christian orthodoxy."

My question is this - would it really matter at the end of the day of Al Mohler, who is looked up to by a lot of people transferred his allegiance from Christ to another gospel? **Would it affect the message?** No, it would not affect the message. It would sorely affect him, and probably confuse many who look up to him, but the message of the gospel would not change.

What we have in the Bible is the once for all faith delivered to the saints. Jude 3, "Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints." **We have a once for all faith delivered to the saints inspired by the Spirit and recorded in the Word of God.** That was the thing that concerned Paul the most - they were drifting from the message of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

What does Paul know about the Galatians spiritual condition? He knows they are drifting from the true message of grace. They are confused over a distorted message that is seeking to add works to grace, add circumcision as a necessary component of salvation. **By pronouncing anathema on**

anyone that tampers with the true gospel Paul is trying to stop them from drifting.

Is it a loving thing to warn people about spiritual danger? If Paul had said that their message is not a big deal they probably would have kept drifting, right? If Paul had said we're really not sure if they're right or wrong, they would have probably kept drifting? He's trying to win them back to the true gospel and so he sounds the anathema alarm to get these people thinking about what is true, right, excellent and praiseworthy in order to get them back on track.

3. Paul's Adamant Defense of the Gospel - Galatians 1:10

Galatians 1:10, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." Adamant means refusing to be persuaded or to change one's mind. The Galatians were being persuaded to change their mind about the gospel and yet the apostle Paul refused to be persuaded or to change his mind about the gospel. Why? Because Paul did not fear man. Paul feared God. The more you fear God the less you will fear man. The more you care about what God thinks the less you will care about what man thinks.

For Paul to refer to himself as a servant of Christ was a big deal for a man with a Hebrew background. S. Lewis Johnson, "That expression, "the servant of Christ," is a remarkable thing for this Hebrew man to utter. All of the Old Testament saints thought that the expression "the servant of the Lord" was probably the highest calling that a person could have. If a person was the servant of the Lord, he was a human representative of the great servant of Jehovah the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah who would come. In the Old Testament God speaks of the prophets as "my servants, the prophets." So the servants of the Old Testament were the servants of the Lord, the servants of Yahweh. And every Hebrew man thought that the servant of the Lord was the highest title that a person could have.

The Apostle Paul, who was brought up in that environment, speaks of himself as a servant of Christ. You can see in his mind that Jesus Christ stands on the same plane as the Lord God. In fact, Jesus Christ is the Lord God for him. That's why, he as a Hebrew man with this great appreciation for the expression the servant of Jehovah, does not feel that

he has taken a downward step at all when he calls himself the servant of Jesus Christ. For Jesus Christ is the Jehovah of Israel.”

The false teachers accused Paul of adjusting the gospel. If that were so, whom was he trying to please? Was he trying to please men? Was that his motive? He answers, ‘If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.’ **Paul thought of himself as a steward of the gospel that he had received.** Therefore, he could only preach the gospel that he received from God. Since he was not preaching for the favor of men, he would not adopt the methods of men. He sought God’s approval, and so he preached the whole counsel of God with respect to the gospel.

Are you and I ready to stand up and contend for the truth like Paul? We won’t be if we have a divided heart. We won’t contend for the truth or suffer for the truth if we have a different outlook on life than Paul had in Galatians 1:10 - Am I on planet earth to please people or am I on planet earth to serve Christ, come what may? Why would I ever consider living the rest of my life as a servant of Christ? I won’t consider living my life that way unless I’m clear about how salvation works and have a high view of the Messiah.

When you look back at church history those who gave their life for the gospel were the clearest thinkers about the gospel. The apostle’s thought clearest about the gospel and they died willingly for it. There is a man in church history named Jan Hus. I want to close with the account of his last day on earth because I know for me reading about men who lost their life for the faith really causes me to consider how important the gospel is - that people would stand firm in it and give their life for it causes me to stop and think about the value of it.

The day Jan Hus was condemned to die was July 6, 1415. His day began in the presence of the solemn assembly of the council in the cathedral. After the performance of high mass and liturgy, Hus was led into the church. The bishop of Lodi delivered an oration on the duty of eradicating heresy; then some theses of Hus and Wycliffe and a report of his trial were read.

An Italian prelate pronounced the sentence of condemnation upon Hus and his writings. Again he protested loudly, saying that even at this hour he did not wish anything but to be convinced from Holy Scripture. He fell upon his knees and asked God with a low voice to forgive all his enemies. Then

followed his degradation-- he was enrobed in priestly vestments and again asked to recant; again he refused. With curses his ornaments were taken from him, his priestly tonsure was destroyed, and the sentence was pronounced that the Church had deprived him of all rights and delivered him to the secular powers. Hus was led away to the stake under a strong guard of armed men.

The executioners undressed Hus and tied his hands behind his back with ropes, and his neck with a chain to a stake around which wood and straw had been piled up so that it covered him to the neck. Still at the last moment, the imperial marshal, asked him to save his life by a recantation, but Hus declined with the words **"God is my witness that I have never taught that of which I have been accused by false witnesses. In the truth of the Gospel which I have written, taught, and preached I will die to-day with gladness."** There upon the fire was kindled with John Wycliffe's own manuscripts used as kindling for the fire. With uplifted voice Hus sang, "Christ, thou Son of the living God, have mercy upon me." Among his dying words he proclaimed, "In 100 years, God will raise up a man whose calls for reform cannot be suppressed." His ashes were gathered and cast into the nearby Rhine River.

Do you know what happened a little over 100 years after Hus died? In 1517 Martin Luther nailed his famous 95 Theses of Contention (a list of 95 issues of heretical theology and crimes of the Roman Catholic Church) into the church door at Wittenberg. When you go back in church history you find a long line of godly people who stood firm in gospel truth and they suffered for it.

May we be a people who receive the baton of the gospel from the apostles through the Word and may know it well so that we do not drift from it and may we too live as servants of Christ. "Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." Let's pray.