2-2-25

Galatians 1:6-10

Last week we looked closely at Paul’s source of authority. First off, he is an apostle. Apostle means “sent one”. A sent one goes with the authority of the one who sends him. Paul was sent by God the Father and Jesus Christ; his teaching carries their authority. Furthermore, because these letters of Paul are recorded in Scripture, we know that his words were directed by the Holy Spirit; so we have the word of God through the writings of Paul.

Paul has to remind the Galatian church of where his authority comes from because those who have come in are challenging his authority and his Gospel; and they are presenting one of their own. There is something important here for us. Sometimes we tend to get exasperated with Paul because of his long sentences and deep spiritual insights. We even read in 2 Peter 3:16 where the apostle Peter refers to Paul’s writings saying, “*as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand*”.

Yet the Lord used Paul to write a large percentage of the New Testament. We might wonder why. But think about Paul’s calling: He was sent to the Gentiles. The vast majority of the world are Gentiles; including us. Paul is the apostle sent to us. The Bible is now spread throughout the Gentile world with Paul still proclaiming and expounding the Gospel. Praise be to our glorious God who would work these things out!

So, let us listen closely as Paul admonishes the Galatian church for being led astray from the true Gospel; because we are in great danger of the same thing. For us, it comes down to the idea of tolerance; of being willing to water down facts; of being unwilling to stand on absolute truth. And we may not want to do this but there is constant pressure from the world and if we don’t make a resolute stance in our beliefs, we will compromise; we will be convinced to accept a different Gospel.

A person or persons had come into the Galatian region and told the churches that Paul hadn’t preached the Gospel properly. These people preached that Jesus was the Saviour but that in addition to believing in Him, a person had to follow all the Law of Moses. We call these people Judaizers, because they were trying to make the Gentiles become Jews. They were actually preaching what has become a very wide spread pattern of false teaching which involves faith plus works. The true Gospel is by faith alone; works play no part in our redemption.

Paul gets right to the point: in verse 6 he tells the Galatian churches “*I am amazed*”. This is strong language; he is amazed, astonished, astounded, dumbfounded; he can’t believe what he has learned about them. And it has happened so quickly; it’s not like they had been worn down by decades of false teachers picking at the Gospel. They bought into what the Judaizers were selling right away. And they shouldn’t have because Paul had clearly presented the Gospel to them and they had accepted it. For them to turn to a different teaching was bewildering and heartbreaking to Paul.

Don’t miss what the Galatians are doing here: they are “*deserting Him*”. They are deserting the One who called them. And that’s not Paul; the Him they are deserting is God Himself. And we are guilty of the same offence anytime we try to relativize the word of God; anytime we water it down to make it more socially acceptable to this offended world; anytime we try to explain away the parts of the Bible that don’t mesh with our society.

Don’t do that. If you are a citizen of the Kingdom of Christ then be a good citizen and be loyal to your King. Stand fast with Him in spite of the consequences. We must remember what He did for us and that’s what Paul refers to. *“[S]o quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ.”* Again that word “grace”: the undeserved favor that God had upon us by sending Jesus to take the punishment that we deserve. By following the teachings of the Judaizers, the Galatian church was proclaiming that the sacrifice of Christ was insufficient. They were proclaiming that the gift of God was not enough and that it needed a little effort on their part.

What a slap in the face to our benevolent God; what a slap in the face to our suffering Saviour. As Paul mentioned back in verse 4, Jesus gave Himself so that we might be rescued. He gave Himself. That’s the cross; that’s the horror and humiliation of the scourging and the mocking; that’s where the man Jesus faced being separated from His Father; that’s where the perfect Son of God faced the terrible wrath of God, all for the sake of we miserable creatures who had already turned our back on our tender loving God.

It is truly a sinful concept to think that we have to add to what Christ has done; or even to think that we could. Now don’t get me wrong, we have plenty of work to do. Loving God with all our being and loving our neighbor as ourselves is more than enough to keep us occupied for the rest of our lives. The Christian life calls us to a lot of work; it’s just that none of it adds to Christ.

The Galatian churches had accepted the Gospel as Paul had presented it. Now they were accepting something new. It was the same Gospel of Jesus, but there were some things added to it. This plays into part of our human nature: we are interested in something new. New and different things attract us and we can be easily drawn to them as a moth to the flame; often with similar results.

Our Bible doesn’t change; the Christmas story doesn’t change; the Good Friday story doesn’t change; the Easter story doesn’t change: we can be easily drawn to some different twist or idea that changes things a little. It keeps things interesting. But it can lead us astray. I invite you to consider each of these foundational truths of Christianity each time they come around in a year. Spend time in meditation and prayer on them, over the whole season. You will find that the same stories will present deeper meaning and more powerful truths each time. They will not be mundane, but they will take on new freshness. This is because the word of God is living and active.

Paul is amazed that they have deserted God for a different Gospel; then quickly points out that there is no other Gospel. He is not correcting himself; he is correcting the notion that there might be some other good news that leads to salvation. Once more we are faced with the fact that the Gospel is offensive to the world. It is sweet to the Christian who has embraced it; but it is offensive to this world and its prince. And here is one of the places where we must decide to stand fast on the Biblical Gospel regardless of opposition; and not yield to the temptation and pressure to water it down or compromise.

First off, the Gospel offends because of the way it came about: It is the horrible death of a man who died in our place because we can’t atone for ourselves. But even more in this day and age is the exclusiveness of the Gospel. The world protests that there should be lots of ways to God and that we ought to be able to even choose our own way. To have only one way is not fair. Well, the Bible is clear that there is only one way; most succinctly put by Jesus in John 14:6, ‘*Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me*.”’

The thing is, to have even one way of salvation is more than fair. If God were strictly a just God, there would be no redemption. All of us deserve damnation due to offending a holy God. But God is also merciful. And so, He made a way to satisfy His justice and deliver us from eternal punishment in Jesus Christ. That’s the part that’s not fair: That the eternally perfect God the Son took the punishment that we deserve.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus asked His Father, that if possible, mankind would be saved by some other way than Him going to the cross. God would have granted His Son anything He asked; but He had to go to the cross, so there was no other way. How dare we ever think that we have to add to Jesus’ work on the cross. No wonder Paul was furious with those who were misleading the Galatian church; no wonder he was dumbfounded with the Galatians who accepted their teaching.

Now, it appears that the Judaizers were preaching salvation through Jesus Christ, they were just adding a few things to it; specifically following the Mosaic Law. It is natural for us to wonder what is wrong with that. The Gospel is still there, we’re just adding a little to it. In our wishy-washy culture, this makes sense. We are getting further and further away from absolute truths.

God is absolute truth and He deals in absolute truths. There may be things in His word that He doesn’t fully explain to us, but He knows exactly how each of them will work out. For example, the timing of the rapture. We know it’s coming, we just don’t know when; but He does. But the Gospel is an absolute truth and it is made clear for us: Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone as Lord and Saviour. And that is clear because of Jesus’ finished work on the cross. To add anything at all makes it different. I’ve heard it said, that anything partially true is entirely false.

To add anything to the Gospel of Christ puts the hearer in serious jeopardy of missing salvation. Remember, the Gospel is exclusive; there is only one way. Holding to the true Gospel is a matter of someone’s eternal life. We must never accept any additions or subtractions. It is simple and straightforward; we cannot deviate.

In verses 8 and 9, Paul makes a very strong statement; we can’t overstate how strong his statement is. He lets them know that the Gospel he preached to them is the right one and the only one, and they are to accept no other regardless of who brings it. Further, any who bring a different Gospel message is to be accursed. He includes himself; if he himself were to come back to the Galatian churches with a different message, they are not to listen to him and he should be accursed. Even if an angelic messenger from heaven itself were to come a preach a different message, they are to be accursed.

Let’s look for a moment at the word translated “accursed” or perhaps “eternally condemned”. The word is anathema; and Paul literally says “let them be damned”. Again, in our day and age we don’t want to hear anything like that. It’s not soft and fluffy and it doesn’t sound like our definition of love. But that’s what Paul writes at the direction of God the Holy Spirit. It is terribly serious with eternal consequences. People who preach a different Gospel lead others away from eternal life, and they face the judgement for that unless they turn to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul asks in verse 10 if it seems that he is seeking the favor of men or of God; whether he is just trying to please people. It’s a rhetorical question but the answer is obvious. If he had wanted to irritate the Judaizers and the people of the Galatian church, he could have hardly done a better job than with what he has just written. No, Paul is single minded in his attempt to please God by winning souls for the Kingdom of Jesus.

He makes the point that if he were trying to please men, then he would not be a bond-servant of Jesus. He is harkening back to the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:24 where He said that no one can serve two masters. In Matthew, the context is trying to serve God and money; but the general principle still applies: we cannot have two masters. We cannot please people and God at the same time. We must remain steadfast in the service of God, and those who are His will gladly join us.

Paul is very abrupt with the Galatians but they have to pay attention. At the very least, they are in danger of loosing fellowship with Christ and of loosing heavenly reward. At the most, it could be the difference between salvation and damnation. Especially for any who are only hearing the false Gospel of the Judaizers.

There are many false Gospels out there; you hear them on the TV, you read them on the internet, and they knock on your door. They are very persuasive because they are demonically driven. Yes, that nice lady on your porch trying to hand you a tract is heavily influenced by satan. The Bible warns us time and again: Don’t be deceived. There is only one Gospel in Jesus Christ and only those who cling to it until the end will be saved.

Prayer

First off Lord, we want to thank You that You are far more powerful than satan and that once we have been sealed with Your Holy Spirit we are under His protection. But we recognize that our flesh fights against the Spirit, such that we might turn from His leading. Merciful Lord, may Your Holy Spirit guide us in His strength; keep forefront in our minds the blessings and benefits of remaining true to our Saviour.

And not only for our benefit Lord, but for Your glory and praise. You are worthy of receiving great honor for what You have done through Jesus Christ our Lord. In Him You were able to satisfy Your unwavering justice yet pour out mercy upon Your wayward creation. You are almighty God and You will be worshiped forever and ever.

Keep us now, we pray; shield us from the lies of satan in whatever form they come or through whomever they come. Let us not be deceived. We ask for discernment so that we can detect any variation of Your perfect Gospel or any twist in Your perfect word. Keep us from compromise when it come to Your absolute truth. May we remain steadfast in clinging to Jesus and no other.

We pray in Jesus’ name

Amen