



Galatians 1:6-10
There Is No Other
9/18/2022

We are picking up in Galatians 1 today.

The tone of Galatians is unlike any other book in the New Testament. Right from the outset it is characterized by urgency. There was an imminent threat to the Galatians as they were about to move away from the thing that's the most important thing for a Christian to cling to, and move away from the message that must be at the heart of a faithful church.

And it stands as an urgent warning for us - because we are tempted, as they were, to leave what's most important (maybe without even knowing it), and there is a temptation for every church to become all about something other than the main thing we are supposed to be about.

Let's read the passage to start today:

Galatians 1:6-10 “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.

If you read through Paul's other letters in the New Testament, he follows a typical form where he starts with a greeting and then some warm thoughts about those he is writing to, things like

1 Corinthians 1:4-7 “4 I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus, 5 that in every way you were enriched in him in all speech and all knowledge— 6 even as the testimony about Christ was confirmed

among you— 7 so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Even here in his first letter to the Corinthians, a church that was behaving badly, he included an encouraging greeting, he told them how he prayed for them. But in Galatians, he has introduced himself and jumps right into this (Galatians 1:6):

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—

So he dispenses with the niceties. It's almost like Paul is storming into the room and letting them know that this couldn't be more urgent. You don't do all of the "I'm always so thankful when I think about you stuff" if you need to warn the people that there's a tornado right outside, headed this way. The pleasantries can wait. We will kumbaya it up later, this is an emergency.

Motivated by love for these people, Paul bursts right in and tells them to watch out, they're derailing their lives and eternities. [By the way, get friends like that - friends who will risk your friendship to say the hard things to keep you from shipwrecking your life. And be a friend like that - who will step in and say the hard things when necessary.]

The urgent crisis is that these people are turning to a different Gospel than the one they had believed when the apostles brought it to them.

And Paul is shocked that this has happened so quickly. Last week we read through a bit of Paul's first encounter with the Galatian Christians and how they turned to God with rejoicing, thrilled that the message of Jesus could free them from the things religious obedience couldn't free them from.

Paul took that trip to Galatia around 48 AD, and he wrote the book of Galatians in probably 49 or 50.

So now, probably within a year or two, Paul has heard that they are tearing down the faith they had and turning to a different Gospel. And Paul says, "Guys, I was *just there!*" If you have kids, you've probably spoken like this to them, "I *just cleaned* this room! How did this happen?"

And Paul says, “You are leaving Jesus so quickly! Your hair is still wet from your baptism and you’re peeling away from Jesus.”

And to be sure, they are turning from Jesus. In verse 6, Paul says they are turning, not from ‘me’, not from ‘the cause,’ not just from ‘better theology,’ not from Paul’s quirky way of doing things, but from Him who called them in the grace of Christ, from God Himself.

He is shocked that these Galatians Christians are deserting Jesus.

But how could you say they are turning from Jesus?

They’re still in church (in verse 2 he said this is a letter written to the churches in Galatia. It wasn’t written to people who decided to stay home from church - it’s written to churches, so the people who heard this letter read were showing up on Sunday - or at least live streaming it.) They were still engaged in church life.

They’re kind people. In chapter 4 Paul says that when he came to them, he had some bodily ailment that presented a burden to them, but they accommodated him, and he said that if they could they would have gouged out their own eyes and given them to him (which seems like a weird way of saying you love someone, unless Paul had problems with his eyesight, which he probably did.) So Paul came in on the edge of blindness, they had to help him get around, accommodate slower reading, some difficulties in interacting, but they did. They served him well as the one who taught them the word and would have done more if they could. They are kind-hearted people, they don’t look like Benedict Arnold or Judas Iscariot.

By all accounts, they seem to be very moral people. They’re probably good neighbors and citizens - there’s no major rebuke of their behavior in this book. You’d probably look at the Galatian church and say, “They’re doing pretty well judging by their lives.”

Now you might read 1 Corinthians and think the Corinthians Christians had deserted Jesus. “They’re getting drunk on communion wine, they’re suing each other, they are divided into factions - they look like they’re turning from Jesus. Why can’t you be more like the Galatians?”

And, they are not denying Jesus. They would call themselves Christians.

So you wouldn't look at them and think, at all, that they are deserting Jesus. They're in church, serving one another, living upright lives, doing good.

But Paul says, "You are traitors. You are turncoats. You are deserting Christ."

And the way they're doing it is by turning to another Gospel (verse 6).

This means that to turn to a different Gospel than the one delivered by the apostles originally (which we have spelled out in the New Testament) is to turn from Jesus.

So this tells us that **what we believe matters**. The content of our faith matters. What we believe matters eternally and urgently.

If doctrine didn't matter, if the only thing that mattered was that we were kind people who served our community, there would be no book of Galatians. They were doing just fine with their lives. (Now it does matter that we are kind people and we should serve our neighbors - if we don't love our neighbors we don't love God.) But the content of our beliefs matters.

****And we can have some beliefs that are so important, that if we get them wrong, we can no longer be considered to have saving faith. We can become so wrong about what we believe that we are now putting our faith in some object that isn't the biblical Jesus - it's another Gospel.**

Now, for sure, this is not true of all errors or wrong beliefs.

You can accidentally put the ranch on instead of the blue cheese. But that's a different class of error than accidentally putting the arsenic on instead of blue cheese. Two different levels of mistakes. The ranch/blue cheese error will make the salad different and if you went with ranch, a little bit worse. But the arsenic/blue cheese error makes the salad deadly.

Not every wrong belief that Christians have is spiritual arsenic. Some of it is just ranch.

Everybody believes some things that are not true, including everyone in this room. Now we don't know what those things are. If we did, we wouldn't believe them. We don't intentionally believe lies, we believe they are true.

And because we believe in a God we can't see, we must all believe some wrong things about God. I know that there has never been a time in my 32 years of being a Christian that I haven't been able to look back at earlier me and see the things I was wrong about. Even looking back 5 years I can see ways I've changed some beliefs because I came to think they were wrong.

But that doesn't mean I wasn't a Christian when I believed some wrong things. So not all errors in belief make us not Christians, not all errors in belief constitute turning from Jesus. And part of wisdom is discerning the things that create another gospel, and things that confuse in a much more mild way.

Christians who treat every minor error as arsenic constantly divide from others until they eventually become a church of one - we can't be connected with any of those people who believe something different about the rapture, or consuming alcohol, or the Christian's role in politics, or how long a sermon should be. Those beliefs matter, and certainly change the salad of our Christian lives, but they're not deadly.

So not every false belief is a heresy.

Harold Brown defines heresies as *"only those doctrines or teachings that change the nature of the faith so fundamentally that it no longer can be trusted to be saving faith... by their very nature [they] so undermine Christian faith that they may well render salvation unattainable for the one who makes the mistake of embracing them."*¹

So if you reject things that you can't reject and still be a Christian (the deity of Jesus, the sinlessness of Jesus, the trinity, man's sin nature and need for a Savior, etc.) you can't be considered a Christian. There aren't Christians who don't believe in Jesus, any more than there are five-sided triangles.

Everything the bible speaks to matters, but not all of it matters in a way that will effect the eternal destiny of your soul.

But there are other gospels that are so distorted that they lead you away from the true Christ, and to embrace them is to turn from Him.

But just in case you think Paul is saying "there are other Gospels", he clarifies:

¹ <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/heresy-in-the-early-church>

Galatians 1:7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

There are distortions of the Gospel that create another gospel.

There were 3 big errors in New Testament days, and there's nothing new under the sun, so many of those big errors are the same today:

- 1) **Licentiousness - anything goes living.** It is the heresy that says you can be a Christian without repenting of sin.
- 2) **Gnosticism - complex amalgamation of strange beliefs, but it said Jesus hasn't come in the flesh, the physical world isn't real.** It is the heresy that denies reality.
- 3) **And the one mainly addressed in Galatians: Legalism.**

Legalism is believing that Jesus' work on the cross was not enough, and we can only get complete *forgiveness from God, approval from God, or acceptance from God through our obedience to God*. It's the idea that to be right with God we need Jesus plus something else. We need Jesus's work plus our good work to make us acceptable to God.

And it doesn't sound so bad. God gave laws, and we should try to follow them. And this idea of free grace, that we can believe in Jesus and without our contributing anything be forgiven, that could certainly create all kinds of aberrant ways of living, right? We'd be spiritual free-loaders, we'd be lazy in our efforts, we wouldn't strive to live holy lives if we were saved only by what Jesus did (a legalism might say.)

So in Galatia, the Judaizers were saying "Yes you need Jesus. Of course, we are Christians here, we are not denying Jesus. But you need to be even better than just a believer - to truly be a child of God, you need Jesus plus outward observances: observe the right feast days, follow the ceremonies, get circumcised. You need Jesus, sure, but his work is incomplete without you and your contributions. AND if you don't make those contributions, you are not saved, you are not a Christian, you will not go to heaven when you die.

And in our day we can distort the Gospel in similar ways:

To be a Christian, you need Jesus plus your works. Or Jesus plus baptism. Or Jesus plus enough self-sacrifice.

We can believe that our good works pay off God to make Him save us.

Now good works always flow from faith - Christians do good works. But they are the fruit, not the root.

And if we think we need Jesus plus something to be Christians, that's a whole different recipe for salvation. It's another Gospel.

So Paul gives a strong warning:

Galatians 1:8 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.

So Paul repeats himself twice here. I said this before, now I'm going to say it again.

He is turning up the rhetorical heat here: *per my last email...* if anyone preaches another Gospel, let him be accursed - the Greek word is anathema. This means cut off from Jesus. To be accursed is to still be under God's curse that we deserve for our sin.

In the gospel, we have complete forgiveness of sin - God sent his son to die so that whoever would believe wouldn't perish but have eternal life. Those who have Jesus don't perish.

But those who believe you need Jesus plus something else do.

And Paul says that even if an angel should walk into this room right now and preach a counterfeit Gospel, even if it's close to the real thing, even if it sounds all Jesusey in ways, he is cut off from God. This is some of the strongest language in the New Testament, Paul is essentially saying, "He can go to hell."²

² "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering." - Luke 11:52

Paul, like Jesus, reserves his strongest language for good-sounding religious leaders who would preach a counterfeit Gospel, causing people to believe it, and thus abandon Christ.

The right Gospel really, really matters.

There are lots of ways to explain the Gospel, lots of areas of life it applies to, and many facets and aspects to the Gospel - so it's not that the Gospel message has to be explained in exactly the same way every time, there's a lot to say about it which always leaves some things unsaid. But here's a place the Gospel is explained in 2 Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 5 17-21 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.² The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. **18** All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; **19** that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. **20** Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. **21** For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Verse 18 says that God reconciled us to Himself. The relationship we should have had with Him was broken by our sin and our rebellion against Him. But he reconciled us to Himself.

And the way he did that, according to verse 21, is He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, and to give us his righteousness. In sending Christ to die on the cross he died for our sin to pay our price and reconnect us to God. So that whoever would believe would not perish but have everlasting life.

And then if we trust in Christ, if we believe, we become new (according to verse 17). A whole different person is produced by being in Christ. This transformation is described as being raised from the dead, taken from darkness to light, and being born all over again. It's a big transformation.

And all of this is the good news of the Gospel, which is the heart of our church because it is at the heart of what God has done and is doing. He has died to reconcile a people to himself.

As Tim Keller says it ““The gospel is this: We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.”

And that good news is the core of what we believe, and it is belief in that that changes everything.

This means that the Gospel is not a set of moral imperatives. It is not good advice. It is not a list of good works that we need to do to achieve heaven or enlightenment or peace. It is good news about something that has been done already.

And it doesn't make our church unique - lots of people believe this - but it does make Christianity unique. Most religions in the world say that if you want to achieve salvation, you must take action. Follow these rituals, join this church, obey these commandments, and if you do, you may get heaven, or nirvana, or a good harvest. That's not good news, but commands for good behavior. The Gospel, however, is good news about what has already been done for us.

And it brings with it an invitation to believe - this good news can be applied to you! If you'll turn from your sin and unbelief and trust in Jesus, trust that this good news is true, you will be forgiven.

This is an incredible Gospel.

And the message of Galatians is that to walk away from it couldn't be more serious.

So some implications of this:

1) Implications for the Deconstruction Movement

I'm not a fan of using the language of deconstruction to describe some of what people do in a crisis of faith. It's borrowed language from philosophy and uses the term pretty clumsily to describe what happens in our hearts and minds in a crisis of faith.

And when people are deconstructing, they can mean anything from “I'm doing some critical thinking” to “I'm deserting Jesus.” And that's a big spectrum of activities that we're misapplying one philosophical term to.

We might say the Bereans in Acts 17:11 were deconstructing because:

Acts 17:11 Now these Jews were more noble than those in Thessalonica; they received the word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so.

But people might also use the term to people like the Galatian Christians who are abandoning the faith. So it's not a super helpful term when people use it that broadly.

On the one hand, **we would encourage Christians who doubt to examine their doubts and seek out answers** for the hard questions that are perplexing them. Don't be afraid to look hard at doubt and try to find answers.

We'd also encourage Christians who are in a crisis of faith to examine their beliefs in light of the scriptures. I've talked to countless people who were taught Christianity by someone who turned out to be a slime bag or a fraud, and that was so shocking that they say, "I don't know what to believe anymore." And a healthy process is to study the scriptures to see which of those beliefs were biblical and which were just manipulative or lies. And to do that with some trusted believing friends or trusted pastors can be helpful and leave you with a refined and strengthened faith.

Critical thinking is good, study and refining of beliefs is good. I want to be able to say five years from now that I've grown in my understanding, which requires leaving some falsehoods behind and embracing truths.

It's not wrong to change old beliefs to line up better with scripture, we are supposed to do that. (Some would call that deconstruction in our day, which I don't think is helpful language, but that process can definitely be good.)

However, many more use the language of deconstruction to put a veneer on their decision to walk away from the Gospel and, thus, to walk away from Jesus. And they are often celebrated as heroes in our day.

But the strong language here for those who are so astonishingly and quickly turning from Christ should stand as a warning to us.

And I know we aren't supposed to use strong language in our day, but I think that's a lie to keep us from warning each other strongly about really damaging things.

Jude gives this balance:

Jude 22 “But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. 22 And have mercy on those who doubt; 23 save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Some people who are weak and doubting are people we should be gentle with and have all kinds of mercy for. Others we snatch out of the fire. Which means there's fire - there's wrath from God and hell waiting for those who would walk away from the only shelter we have from the wrath of God, the gospel of Jesus.

Don't just chuck that cavalierly. And don't treat it cavalierly when your friends do.

So this all has implications for the deconstruction movement. It also has implications for the ideals of pluralism and tolerance that our society says it embraces.

2) Implications for Pluralism and Tolerance

On the one hand, Christians are tolerant of non-Christians (or should be.) And that's because we know you can't make someone a Christian by force. So while we want our neighbors to become Christians, we can't force them to with laws or compulsion. So true Christianity should make us tolerant of our unbelieving neighbors, and that will mean we live in societies that are pluralistic - people worship a number of different gods or no gods at all.

We are tolerant because we can't force people to become Christians.

But it isn't because all beliefs are equally valid.

There is only one Gospel.

Galatians 1:6-7 “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.”

We should be kind to everyone, patient with everyone, not using force to spread the Gospel, seeing the image of God even in our neighbors who don't believe the Gospel. But to turn from the Gospel is to turn from the grace of Christ.

Paul doesn't say, "You're turning from the gospel, but at least you still have faith in something," or "you're turning from the Gospel but there are a lot of valid ways to get to God - you're good people, for crying out loud, you'll be fine."

He says, "Let the one who preaches these false gospels be under God's curse." Because they aren't all true.

We respect all people, serve all people, but don't accept all beliefs as equally valid.

We even go as far as defending the rights of others to believe false gospels and worship the gods they worship, but it isn't because what they believe is true.

3) Implications for Mysticism and Feelings-First Christianity

When Paul says that even if an angel should preach another gospel, let him be accursed, he is saying something big about how we know and test truth.

Sometimes we might be tempted to think, "I know what the Bible says, but I have had an experience that makes me believe otherwise:

- 1) A kind teacher teaches contrary to it
- 2) A miracle-working preacher preaches contrary to it, but he has the miracles
- 3) I have a deep feeling or impression that in my case I should act contrary to it

But he says that even if an angel should preach contrary to it, it isn't valid.

Our mystical experiences aren't more important than the Bible in telling us the truth.

So Paul says all of this, and then he says:

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.

Fear of Man

We need to recapture this understanding - we have to choose between pleasing society and pleasing Christ. In Paul's day, as in ours, to preach an exclusive Gospel, to warn people in strong language from deserting it, to stand up to false but well-respected teachers, to claim exclusivity of the Gospel, will not make you cool and acceptable in culture. But:

Proverbs 29:25 - The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is safe.

Luke 12:4-7 - I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have nothing more that they can do. But I will warn you whom to fear: fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him! Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows.

It's going to be necessary for Christians to think this way: I have to choose to fear God, or fear public disapproval. But because of the goodness of God in Christ, we stick with Him.

Prayer of Confession:

Assurance of Pardon:

**Isaiah 55:7 "let the wicked forsake his way,
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;
let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him,
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.**

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) Why do you suppose Paul uses such harsh language here?

- 2) Contrast the language of Galatians 1 and Philippians 1:15-18. Why do you think Paul urges such a gracious, benefit-of-the-doubt giving assessment of the teachers in Philippi but is so harsh with the teachers in Galatia?
- 3) The three main heresies of the early church were licentiousness, gnosticism, and legalism. How do we fall into similar false beliefs today?
- 4) Why do you suppose that adding our own righteous deeds to the sacrifice of Christ to earn our approval before God is such a big problem? Why is it “damnable?”
- 5) How do we personally cling to the gospel and keep ourselves from drifting?