

MBC – 4/10/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“This is Not Man’s Gospel!”
 Galatians 1:10-24

Intro – *No more mister nice guy.*

Galatians doesn’t begin with the niceties of Paul’s other letters because he isn’t feeling nice: He’s astonished and he’s angry: many of them were deserting God’s sweet Gospel of grace for a harsh message of law-keeping. Paul said, “That’s a perversion. It’s no gospel at all, and anyone who preaches a different message than the one we preached is *anathema*. Let’s pick it up in v.10—

- Galatians 1:10 ¹⁰For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? (Men-pleasers don’t generally put a curse on people!) If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

So some were accusing Paul of preaching his own message to gain people’s approval. That was a dumb accusation. We heard in our Scripture reading: the true Gospel will never win any popularity polls – It’s the false gospel of works that is man-pleasing. Then Paul goes on to defend his apostleship and the Gospel—

- Galatians 1:11–24 ¹¹For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me *is not man’s gospel*. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother. ²⁰(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only were hearing it said, “He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

* * *

I. Sola Scriptura before Sola Fide.

Paul goes to great lengths here to establish his authority as an Apostle to establish the authority of the message he preaches—

- Galatians 1:1 ¹Paul, an apostle—*not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father* – and v.11: . . . the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. ¹²For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul's authority was from God, not man, and Paul's Gospel was from God, not man. His apostleship and his Gospel stand or fall together. This is why these Judaizers who wanted to add works to grace, sought to *discredit* Paul's message by *discrediting* his apostleship. And it's why Paul goes from here to 2:14 defending his apostleship – we're thinking, "Paul, can't you move on here," but the Holy Spirit knows that we won't trust the message until we trust the messenger!

*During the Reformation, the principle of Sola Scriptura (Scripture alone) came before the principle of Sola Fide (Faith alone), because the Reformers couldn't define the Gospel until they 'nailed down' where to find the Gospel: Where has God revealed Himself? Was it Scripture plus tradition? The Reformers said, "No, Scripture is the *sole* (one and only) source of divine revelation, the *only* inspired, infallible, final, and authoritative norm of faith and practice." Scripture. Alone—This is where God has spoken, fully, and finally, so this is where we find His Gospel.

- Not the ongoing, ever-changing teachings of the Catholic Church. Or the bizarre, revelations of Joseph Smith, or unbiblical translations of the Watchtower organization, or the so-called prophetic writings of Ellen G. White or Mary Baker Eddy, or Mohammed, or David Koresh – or any so-called modern prophets who get "a word from the Lord."

Unless we are absolutely clear that Scripture alone is our sole authority then we don't know what to believe, and we leave the door open to demonic perversions of the Gospel.

*Many people have criticized me, and left this church over the years because they say we "bash Catholics and talk smack about other churches. . . why can't we be nice?" I'll tell you why: Because "*if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to one you received, let him be anathema.*" And that's why I will continue to call out churches that falsely claim to speak from God – because when you do that, you destroy the church's firm foundation, and the Gospel is anyone's guess.

By the way, we can never state the true Gospel of God's grace, too often, so here is the—

- Westminster Longer Catechism's definition (in your bulletin): for elect believers, God "pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in His sight; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone"

II. Paul's 4 proofs that "This is not man's Gospel!"—

Paul says to the Galatians – and to us – "I preached this message, but I certainly didn't invent it. **This is not man's gospel!**" And here is the proof. *First*, when he says, "*This is not man's gospel.*" He means that—

1. "No man could or would invent such a message."

Why not? Because it goes against everything in our fallen human nature—

A. *It condemns us as sinners.*

The Gospel doesn't flatter you or tell you to feel good about yourself. It begins by condemning you as a helpless, hopeless, pitiful sinner, who needs to be forgiven for your mountain of sins against God. We

hear that as an insult! We live in a time when self-esteem and self-love are proclaimed as the only way to happiness. The Gospel says that repentance opens the gates of God's mercy and kindness.

- A few years ago I put this message up on the sign: "Jesus died for sinners – you qualify!" Later in the week I was at the bank and a gal who does not like our church was bending the teller's ear: "Did you see that awful message on that church sign? Who do they think they are putting up that stupid, negative message. . ." Apparently she missed the first 4 words: "Jesus *died* for sinners."
- I think of a gal who came to church for over a year before she finally left and told someone, "I get tired of hearing that I'm a sinner week in, week out." But Jesus died for sinners! God justifies the *ungodly*!

But men would never invent a message like this. And second—

B. It condemns our goodness.

The Gospel says that our very best, most noble deeds and efforts are like filthy rags if we offer them up to gain God's favor (Isa.64.6). We want to say to God, "Look God, I've been a great parent, I help out in my community, I give to the Red Cross – I recycle." And God responds: "You must count it all as *loss* – zero, (Paul called it all "dung") if you would gain Christ⁹ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of your own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— Philippians 3:9.

And that goes against our fallen nature. We saw last week that every cult and every false religion wants to contribute human good to salvation. And the Gospel of grace rejects it all. You *must* come to Christ, poor in spirit, broken, bankrupt and busted. Nothing in your hands—

No list of sins I have not done, no list of virtues I pursue,
No list of those I am not like can earn myself a place with you.

That self-righteous Pharisee praying in the temple hated that message. The older brother in Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, hated that message. And every son and daughter of Adam hates that message until God does a radical heart change and makes us like the poor tax collector who cried out, "O God be merciful to me, I am a sinner, through and through, my only hope of righteousness is not in me, but only you."

Beloved, this is not man's Gospel! Paul said it's "foolishness" –until God opens our eyes! But Paul also means that the Gospel doesn't have its source in him or any other man—

2.) "I certainly didn't invent it."

And he makes three arguments here—

A. "No one was more anti-Christ and anti-Christian than me!"

- Galatians 1:13–14 ¹³For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it.

How did this church persecutor become a Gospel preacher? Paul's apostleship had to be a God thing – there is no other reasonable explanation—

- Acts 9:1–2 . . . Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.
- Acts 22:4 . . . I persecuted this Way to the *death*, binding and delivering to prison both men and women,
- 1 Timothy 1:13 ¹³. . . formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent (of Christ and His church.)

He hated Christians and their message, and second—

B. “No one was more pro-Judaism than me!”

- ¹⁴And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.
- Acts 22:3–4 ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city, educated at the feet of Gamaliel according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, being zealous for God as all of you are this day.

What would turn Paul 180 degrees away from the faith of his fathers to the faith that he persecuted? – Paul met Jesus! And the truth is, Paul had a tough time for years after his conversion, because people just couldn't believe Saul the Christian killer was now a Christian himself!—

- Galatians 1:23 ²³They only were hearing it said, “He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”

And there's a third argument Paul gives to prove that there is no way his apostleship and his Gospel were his own invention—

C. “I would be the last person to want to see Gentiles saved!”

- Galatians 1:15–16 ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the *Gentiles*. . .

We have to let that land on our brains: Paul had hated all Gentiles – *especially* those who would claim to believe in that false messiah, Jesus! He wanted them dead. And now he's an Apostle of Jesus, with Good News for Gentiles? How do you explain this? I want to tell you a true story right here. It's such a God thing. Let me read to you—

****The amazing story of George Lyttleton and Gilbert West—***

George Lyttleton was born in England in 1709. He was a prolific poet, Oxford graduate, and member of Parliament. He had a cousin named Gilbert West who was also an intellectual and a writer. Living in the “Age of Reason,” both were deists, and critical of Christianity, and together the two set out to disprove Christianity once and for all. They agreed that the two strongest proofs for Christianity were the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the conversion of Paul. So Lyttleton set about to disprove Paul’s conversion, and West set out to disprove the resurrection. They spent an entire year doing painstaking research, and when they came together at the end of the year, to their own shock, they had both become Christians!

They both wrote books on what they found, but defending the faith instead of discounting it. (I gave you Lyttleton’s book cover on the other side of your outline – what a hoot!) to sum up his findings, he studied Paul’s life in Acts and his epistles and concluded that there were only four possible explanations for his conversion:

- 1.) He was “an impostor who said what he knew to be false, with an intent to deceive;” or
- 2.) He was a mad man with “an overheated imagination;” (i.e., coo-coo for cocoa puffs) or
- 3.) He was “deceived by the fraud of others;” and none of these options were reasonable, so Lyttleton concluded this, that—
- 4.) What Paul declared to be the cause of his conversion did all really happen; “and, (listen to his conclusion) *therefore the Christian religion is a divine revelation.*”

I.e., Paul saw Jesus, Jesus saved Paul, gave him his apostleship, and gave him his message – i.e., this is not man’s gospel!

3.) “I didn’t get it from the other Apostles.”

Now you have to get his point here, and it goes through 2:14: Paul didn’t get the Gospel second-hand from the Apostles – that’s what he is accused of doing, copying or plagiarizing his message—

- Galatians 1:15–17a ¹⁵But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, *I did not immediately consult with anyone;* ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were Apostles before me.

He gives three “alibi’s” to prove that he didn’t spend any time in Jerusalem being taught or trained by the Apostles there—

1.) Alibi #1.

- V.17 . . . but I went away into *Arabia*, and returned again to Damascus.

According to Acts 9:20, immediately after his conversion, Paul went on to Damascus, but instead of persecuting Christians, he was preaching to them. Then he went to the Arabian desert for three years. I think he went there to meditate and digest what had just happened to him: I’m sure he went back over the entire OT looking for Christ – he had a whole new set of glasses on, didn’t he? When we come to Acts, Paul goes to the Jewish synagogues and shows them from their own Scriptures that Jesus is the Messiah and He is the Son of God!

The point he is making is that he didn't go to Jerusalem and consult with the Apostles or get their stamp of approval on his ministry. He goes on in V.1: after this time he went back to Damascus, And Acts 9 tells the story that the King tried to kill him, but some of the disciples lowered him down the city wall in a basket!

2.) Alibi #2.

- Galatians 1:18–19 ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Luke fills in some more details of this quick trip—

- Acts 9:26–30 ²⁶And when he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples. And they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus. ²⁸So he went in and out among them at Jerusalem, preaching boldly in the name of the Lord. ²⁹And he spoke and disputed against the Hellenists. But they were seeking to kill him. ³⁰And when the brothers learned this, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

So yes, he did go to Jerusalem, but it was a very short visit, he didn't even meet all the Apostles, and spent most of the time their preaching and teaching. He certainly wasn't there to get their input – he already had the Gospel down. And then—

3.) Alibi #3.

- Galatians 1:20–24 ²⁰(In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) I love that, don't you? ²¹Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴And they glorified God because of me.

So his third argument is that he was way up north after that, nowhere near Jerusalem – the fact is most of the Christians in that area (Judea) had never met Paul and all they knew about him was that he was that Christian-persecutor that was now preaching the faith that he once tried to destroy! And notice that he wasn't some rockstar Christian with an amazing testimony to them: they glorified God, not Paul.

We will pick up on what happened with Paul after that next week. But you get his argument: My Gospel is not man's Gospel: I didn't make it up, and I didn't get it second hand from the bigshots in Jerusalem—

- *But this is amazing: even though Paul didn't get his Gospel from Peter, or John, or James – they all preached the same Gospel, which means that all of them received it from Jesus Himself, amen? There is only one Gospel, it is not man's Gospel.

So now let's go back to answer the question: then where did Paul's Gospel come from?

4.) "I received it from Jesus Christ Himself."

- v.12 For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ—
- Galatians 1:15–16 ¹⁵But when He who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by His grace, ¹⁶was pleased to *reveal* His Son to me, in order that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. . .

When did this happen?

- Acts 26:13–18 ¹³At midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, that shone around me and those who journeyed with me. ¹⁴And when we had all fallen to the ground, I heard a voice saying to me in the Hebrew language, ‘Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.’ ¹⁵And I said, ‘Who are you, Lord?’ And the Lord said, ‘I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. ¹⁶But rise and stand upon your feet, for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you as a servant and witness to the things in which you have seen me *and to those in which I will appear to you*, ¹⁷delivering you from your people and from the Gentiles—to whom I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’

That was Jesus! Wow. And it wasn’t the last time He appeared to Paul and spoke to him. Jesus appeared to Paul more than once in the Book of Acts, and other times as well. Listen to two more passages like this—

- 1 Corinthians 11:23 ²³“For *I received from the Lord* what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread. . .” and he goes on to explain the Lord’s Table – Paul wasn’t there on that night in the Upper Room: But Jesus later *revealed* it to him.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 ³For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also *received*: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

I believe it was during those three years in the Arabian desert, that Jesus taught Paul many things – this was direct, personal revelation from Jesus Himself to Paul. And every time he wrote his epistles, Jesus was also with him, guiding him to write through his own pen and personality, exactly the words He wanted in His New Covenant Scriptures.

So what you hold in your hands is not simply the words of man, but the Word of God. And the Gospel it contains is not man’s Gospel. And that leads to our last point—

III. None of us will receive this Gospel until God opens our eyes.

We’re all born, trapped in spiritual darkness and blindness, wandering, groping, experimenting. And even if we wanted to find the light switch, we can’t –because we love our sins and don’t want God to shine His light on those sins. And there’s even something else keeping us from seeing the Light:

- 2Co 4:3-4 . . . the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We're blinded, in darkness, we even hate the light – and a supernatural being, the devil, works fulltime to keep us in this darkness, so how can we ever escape? We can't. Only God can set us free, and through the Gospel, He does—

- 2Co 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

This is what happens when God reveals the glory of His Son to a blind sinner, it's as immediate as the light from the sun. There is light where there was darkness and sight where there was blindness. And when it happens - you *know* Jesus! Maybe you saw Him before, but now you *know* who it is you are looking at! One day it happened to—

Two on the road to Emmaus—

Two people were walking with the resurrected Jesus on the road to Emmaus. They had no idea it was Jesus they were talking to about the crucifixion and resurrection—until Jesus was ready to reveal Himself to them—

- Luke 24:31 ³¹And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.

This is what happens when God open a person's spiritual eyes: this Jesus, who used to just be a *good man*, is now the *God-man!* Jesus, who used to be a Sunday School figure to color with crayons is now God's King and God's Son!

How does this happen? Jesus told Peter: "Peter, flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven!" Jonathan Edwards called it: "*A divine and supernatural light immediately imparted to the soul by the Spirit of God.*" It is God, supernaturally shining the light of the Gospel into your heart, enabling you to see and savor Jesus as Lord, God, and Savior!

That's how Paul received the Gospel, and that's how we receive it – God must reveal it—

Has God revealed His Son to you? Do you want Him to do that – this morning? Let's pray.