

MBC – 4/3/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Only One Gospel”
 Galatians 1:6-9

We began a new study last Lord’s Day in Paul letter to the Galatians – turn there with me—

Paul begins by defending his right as a Christ-appointed Apostle to defend, and declare the Gospel message to them. They needed to know, 2,000 years ago, who speaks from God. We need to know the very same thing this morning—

- Galatians 1:1–9 ¹Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— ²and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:

And then he gives a brief summary of the Good news—

- ³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The good news that Paul proclaimed to them and to us is that God in heaven took all the initiative to make a way for sinners to be forgiven and reconciled to Him, through the death of His Son for them. You can’t do anything to earn or deserve this salvation; it is a *gift* of God’s grace that can only be received through trusting in Jesus, alone.

Paul had preached this Gospel to the churches in Galatia less than a year earlier, but already many of them of them abandoning the Good News for a different message being delivered by false teachers. So the next thing we read is *not* Paul thanking God for their faith, or saying how much they were in his prayers – we read that in his other letters. Instead, he delivers a severe rebuke and warning—

- ⁶I am *astonished* that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But 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. ⁹As 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.

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- Matthew 7:13–20 ¹³“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. ¹⁴For the *gate* is narrow and the *way* is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

These are Jesus’ words. He said it’s hard to be saved because it’s hard to trust in Him alone to save you. That goes against our fallen flesh: We like to have options to choose from. Jesus gives us one – Him. And we like to earn what we get, don’t we? We like to list our achievements and show off our trophies and certificates and degrees. We don’t generally show people *gifts* that we received.

- But it's not just hard to be saved. Jesus said in Matt.19:26, "with man, this is *impossible*, but with God all things are possible." We simply *won't* enter through that narrow gate or stay on that narrow road apart from the grace of a merciful God who calls us to Himself and holds His children fast.

But there's something that makes it hard to even get to the narrow gate: false prophets – in Gk. *pseudo_prophete_s*. They block the way. They change the road signs. They tape up a "This way to heaven," sign pointing to the broad road that leads to hell. They conceal landmines along the way to the narrow gate, to blow up wandering pilgrims.

Or the picture that Jesus Himself uses: false prophets are ravenous wolves disguised to look like sheep, stalking, lurking, ripping up and naïve, unsuspecting sheep looking for a shepherd to follow. And for every true preacher calling people to the narrow gate and the narrow way, there are 10 false preachers calling people to the broad way that leads to destruction. Jesus about them—

- Matthew 18:6 ⁶but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea.

Jesus said in—

- Matthew 23:13 ¹³"But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in.
- Paul said in Romans 16:18 ¹⁸For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the *naïve*.

Naïve, i.e. gullible, undiscerning people. "Nice" people: "Oh but he has such a nice smile, and his wife is so beautiful. He quotes from the Bible (I think, I don't really know the Bible very well), and he shows pictures of himself posing in front of an orphanage in Haiti." Can I tell you a little secret? *Every* false teacher has a "ministry to orphans" in Haiti.

He said this to the Corinthians about these deceiver—

- Corinthians 11:13–15 ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

They look and act like angels, but they are devils. And they don't just come from the outside, they even rise up from within the church. Paul exhorted the Ephesians Elders—

- Acts 20:28–31 ²⁸Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and *from among your own selves* will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the

disciples after them. ³¹Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Now all of this explains what we read here in Galatians. Let's look at—

I. Paul's astonishment.

- ⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ.

Astonished is the word used for how people responded to Jesus' miracles: knocked out of their sense – blown away. Amazed. Paul couldn't comprehend how, in less than a year, they could turn away from such good news as the Gospel! I mean they had heard it from the greatest preacher and teacher the church has ever known, next to Jesus. It's not like he was confusing, or boring. Paul can hardly believe it—

- They were turning away from "*God who called them.*" This was a very personal thing: They weren't just changing their minds about a doctrine or an idea, like becoming vegan or something. They were turning away from God the Father, the Good Shepherd of Ps.23. Their Creator who had sent His own Son from heaven to rescue them and make peace with them through His blood. What a sweet message. What a kind message. And He did it "*in the grace of Christ,*" God says to us: "This is all coming as a free gift, through what My Son has done. I'm not asking for any help, any effort, or performance on your part. Just trust in My Son."

I said last week no one on earth could invent a message so loving and simple – just what weak, failing sinners need to hear! And when you hear Your Shepherds voice, calling you in the Gospel, "*You who are weary, come home!*" - You can't help but follow Him. Amen? But this is what they were deserting: they were turning their backs on the Giver and the Gift. Worse than that, they were trading God and the Gospel for a message that would enslave them again. Paul had to be thinking of the words of Jeremiah—

- Jeremiah 2:11–13 ¹¹Has any nation ever traded its gods for new ones, even though they are not gods at all? Yet my people have exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols! ¹²The heavens are shocked at such a thing and shrink back in horror and dismay," says the LORD. ¹³"For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!

Isn't that just what the Galatians were doing? Why in the world would people reject the freedom of the Gospel for slavery? But 2,000 years later, it's still happening. And that's why we are studying Galatians – so that we would never do the same thing!

II. The different "Gospel" they were receiving.

- ⁶I am *astonished* that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

The word for "deserting" was used of military desertion in a time of war – going AWOL in the middle of battle. Paul calls these Galatians who are abandoning the Gospel, turncoats and traitors – And I know that sounds over the top, but I think he is trying to shake them and get their attention: "People, we are

talking eternal life vs. eternal destruction, and when you switch sides in this spiritual warfare, you are aiding and abetting the enemy.” Jesus said, “*You are for Me or against Me.*” Serious stuff.

He says they have turned to a *different Gospel* – but then, it’s like the Holy Spirit elbowed him in the side and he wanted to clarify in v.7: “*not that there is another one.*”

Now the KJV says, “*you have turned to another gospel, which is not another,*” and it sounds confusing, so let me explain—

- “*Different*” in v.6 is the word “*heteros,*” as in our word heterosexual. God created humanity in two different sexes – and only two. But the word in v. 7 is the word *allo* which means another of the same kind.

*But like the KJV sometimes we use the word *another* in two opposite ways: You open a box of See’s chocolates and take a bite of one, make a face, and say, “I want *another* one,” meaning a different kind – and then you put the chocolate back with a bite out of it – don’t you, Janice?

- Or if you are at our Thursday night study and try one of Tessa’s chocolate chip cookies, you will say, “I want *another!*” meaning, another of the *same* kind. So Paul says here that they have deserted the Gospel of God’s grace for “*another,*” a different Gospel, but upon some quick reflection, he says, “there really isn’t another Gospel – of the same kind,” He means that there is only one true Gospel, and any other Gospel is a different Gospel. Look at what he says—
- but there are some who trouble you and want to distort (or pervert) the gospel of Christ.

If you distort the Gospel, if you twist it, tweak it, add to it, or take away from it, it is a “different” Gospel – which means that it is no longer the Gospel. Which means – that it doesn’t save. Now in Sunday School we were discussing that you can come up with creative ways to share the Gospel message, but you can’t *change* the message without destroying it.

And in particular, here in Galatia, this different Gospel that was no Gospel was—

A. A message that added works and took away grace.

We know exactly what these **Judaizers** were preaching because it was the whole reason for the Jerusalem Council in—

- Acts 15:1 ¹But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

“Believe in Jesus, and keep the Law.” But if you add any human effort or merit you nullify God’s grace because it’s no longer His gift to you, but it’s your gift to Him! And then, who gets the glory?

- We all know what this means: You are out to dinner and your friends take the check – and you protest, “No, you don’t need to do that, let us chip in.” And they say, “No, we want to do this, it’s our gift to you.” Now what if, when you would get home, you write them a check for your half of the meal, plus tax and tip, and mail it off to them (or easier, Venmo). How would your friends feel? Like you rejected their gift to you – because that’s exactly what you did.

Beloved, if you seek to pay God back or *contribute* to your salvation, you are insulting His grace – and – and – you are rejecting Jesus’ finished work. Didn’t He cry out from the cross, “*Tetelestai*, which can be translated “*Paid in Full – tax and tip included?*” The Gospel is the message of God’s free grace toward sinners, and Christ’s finished to accomplish that salvation. Add to it and it’s a different Gospel, which is no Gospel.

We’re going to see in this letter that Paul couldn’t tolerate even a drop of human works added to the Gospel—

- I just read that a new drug is turning up on the streets and killing people by the thousands. It’s isotonitazene, ISO for short. And it is 20-100 times stronger than Fentanyl which is 80 times stronger than morphine. A drop on your skin will kill you.

And even a drop of good works added to grace destroys it. Even when God’s Law is added to His grace, His grace ceases to be grace. And every false religion adds works to grace, because that is the bent of our fallen human nature: we want to be our own saviors.

1.) Mormons will argue with you that they are good Christians, but—

Mormons define grace as: “the help or strength given through the Atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Beloved, we don’t need help, we need rescue! Jesus didn’t die to help us, He died to save us from this present evil age.

- 2 Nephi 25:23 “by grace we are saved, *after all we can do.*” That makes Jesus a helper, not a Savior.

2.) Jehovah’s Witnesses

J.W.’s say that Jesus was created as Michael the Archangel, was not God, and did not raise physically from the dead – oh, and He returned to earth, invisibly, in 1914. So, they strike out on many counts, and when it comes to salvation: “Salvation is described as a free gift from God, but is said to be unattainable without good works that are prompted by faith.” That statement is a contradiction. You can’t add to God’s free gift. They are working their way to heaven – that’s why they go door to door and stand in front of the post office with their Watchtower magazines.

3.) Roman Catholicism

– R.C. Sproul has been showing in SS that Rome teaches that we are justified by faith, but our works play a part in our justification. I read an article this week by a Catholic scholar trying to explain this and it was so convoluted and confusing – and yet the Gospel is so clear! But he wrapped up his article by finally saying: “*there is more to this justification thing than faith alone.*”

No, there’s not! Jesus said, “It is finished!” – “*Full atonement, can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior!*” Jesus paid it all, hallelujah! Beloved there is such freedom in the Gospel: There is no work to be added, no penance to finish paying for leftover sins.—

- I remember talking to a girl who I believe is a Christian, but she just couldn't completely grasp how Christ had set her free. She showed me her arms and they were all scarred from cutting herself. She asked me, "Why do I do this?" And I said to her, "Every time you cut yourself, you are trying to punish yourself for something Jesus already took the punishment for. You need to believe the Gospel that Jesus was cut for you!"

Let me stop here and underline two truths about the Gospel in this passage:

B. Two truths about the Gospel—

1.) The Gospel has content. It is a *definable* message. It's not just nice ideas that people have conversations about. It is truth propositions that must be believed or rejected. It is a message that can be deserted, it can be distorted. Or it can be received. And as Paul shows us, you can say: "This is the Gospel and this is not the Gospel." And there is only one Gospel.

Oh, our world hates this! "Who are you to say that Jesus is the only way to God! . . . are you saying that every other religion is wrong? I believe that we all worship the same God. . . there are many roads to God. . ." Preach it, Satan. And Satan is currently waging a nuclear war on what the world call binary distinctions: right and wrong, black and white – even male and female – oh no, those are binary distinctions, can't have that.

- Some of you have heard that Disneyland is trying to get rid of all gender references at their parks. They will no longer say "Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls." Now it will be, "Hello, dreamers of all ages."

The point is this: the Gospel is not just any good message or God message or helpful message. It is the one message of rescue, by God's grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, alone. And if you get it right, you will experience opposition, hate, and persecution.

2.) The Gospel has power – V.6: God "*called you by the grace of Christ.*" "Called" in the NT means more than just inviting, or offering an opportunity. Like when a parent calls to the children, "Come to dinner!" "In a minute. . . when I finish this game." No power in that call. You are just expressing a wishful desire.

But in the NT, when God *calls* a person, that person comes – we say it is an effectual call – it works because it comes with the power of God. The call of God in the Gospel accomplishes His will and saved His people—

- Romans 1:16 ¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it *is* the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

Paul doesn't say that it *has* the power, or it *contains* the power, but it *is* God's power to save. When God calls you by His grace in the Gospel, you are literally re-born – you are not the same person. What other message can do that? Only the one true Gospel. And many of you here have heard that call and you have come. You might have heard the words 1,000 times before you *heard* Jesus. And that's when God "**Called you by His grace, and taught you, gave you ears and gave you eyes.**" That's when the Gospel became the power of God for your salvation.

- Janice and I read John 10 the other day where Jesus says, “I am the good Shepherd. The good Shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. . . I know My own, and My own know Me.” And because of that: “. . . the sheep follow Him, for they know His voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.”

What other philosophy or religion or ideology has that power? Or brings that comfort? None. Beloved, there is only Gospel, one Good News that saves and brings new life! I pray everyone here would hear it this morning. And if you hear Jesus voice, you will follow Him.

III. Paul’s anathema.

But if we had any doubts about how serious Paul was about getting the Gospel right, he removes all doubt in—

- Galatians 1:8–9 ⁸But 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.

And lest anyone think that Paul was just exaggerating in a moment of passion, he says it again—

- ⁹As 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.

Anathema was used in the OT of anything that was “devoted to destruction,” “under God’s curse.” It sounds awful, and it is. But we need to realize that since the Fall, all of humanity is under God’s curse until and unless it is removed through trusting Christ—

- John 3:36 ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
- 1 Corinthians 16:22 ²²If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.

The Gospel is the good news that all who believe are rescued from the curse in Christ—

- Galatians 3:13 ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—

But to pervert or distort this good news is a horrible thing. Paul says, “It doesn’t matter who it is, even it was me, or any other Apostle, or even an angel from heaven who would proclaim to you a false Gospel – let him be accursed!” So – was Paul just exaggerating when he mentions even an angel from heaven distorting the Gospel? Would an angel ever do that? *Didn’t an angel do that in the Garden?*—

- God tells Adam and Eve that all of this perfect life He had created is theirs, forever – as long as they don’t eat from that one tree, but if they do that, will die. Satan – a fallen angel – sidles up to Eve and says: “No. Wrong. You should eat it – you will not surely die!”

She did, then Adam did, and that put creation under the curse, waiting for Jesus to come and set it free. And since then, it has been Satan’s full-time job to keep people in the dark, and under the curse. And he has helpers, like the men Paul described right here in Galatians—

- 2 Corinthians 11:13–15 ¹³For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.

And in ways we don't even know, he uses his own demons, to put out twisted, distortions of the Gospel, which is why John warns us—

- 1 John 4:1 ¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.

Islam—

How did Islam begin? An angel (supposedly Gabriel) appeared to Mohammed to give him revelations from God, Allah. It's interesting that he worried that he might be being deceived by evil *jinn* – we get our word “genie,” evil angels. He was! And we see the consequences 1,400 years later.

Mormonism—

And there is another false religion that can be traced to a demon posing as an angel from heaven. And you have all seen him, in gold, perched atop of Mormon temples with his long trumpet. His name is Moroni. I want to take a few minutes to tell you about this angel—

According to LDS theology, Moroni started out as a human being. He was the son of the prophet Mormon (for whom the Book of Mormon is named). Mormon began writing his message on golden tablets, and after his death his son Moroni finished the work and buried the tablets in what would become western New York. After Moroni's death, he became an angel and eventually appeared to Joseph Smith, telling him the location of the tablets and giving him the ability to translate them – (he gave him a set of spectacles called the Urim and Thummim). Smith published his alleged translation as the Book of Mormon – and the golden tablets were taken up to heaven. Moroni also allegedly appeared to several other witnesses who would vouch for the veracity of Smith's claims. Most of them later recanted that they ever saw any angel or golden plates.

Initially, Joseph Smith simply referred to an angel, without giving his name. Later, he identified the angel as Moroni. According to LDS teaching, the angel Moroni is also identified as the angel in Revelation 14:6: “Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people.”

But this angel revealed that “we are saved by grace, after all we can do?” Paul says, “let that angel be accursed!” And he also revealed the immoral doctrine of polygamy to Joseph Smith—

Joseph Smith had at least 40 wives, some of whom were already married, and some as young as 14. One of them, **Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner**, wife of Adam Lightner, claimed that Joseph had told her that an angel came to him with drawn sword and commanded him, in 1834 to take her, already married, as his wife. She was 17.

- Mormon Elder George Q. Cannon said of Joseph Smith. “He was visited constantly by angels,” “He had vision after vision in order that his mind might be fully saturated with a knowledge of the

things of God, and that he might comprehend the high and holy calling that God had bestowed upon him" (*Journal of Discourses*, 23:362). Historical records of early Latter-day Saints, Doctrine and Covenants, and early Church documents reveal that Joseph Smith's visions and visits by heavenly messengers are too numerous to count."

➤ I read a Mormon article on the internet entitled *24 angels who visited Joseph Smith*, and it even included—Adam, Abraham, Seth, Enoch, Isaac, Jacob, Gabriel, Raphael (isn't that on the teenage mutant ninja turtles?), Moses, John the Baptist, and all the Apostles – and Paul – and don't you wonder why Paul didn't warn poor Joseph Smith about angels from heaven who might distort the Gospel??

So what do we make of all of this – did Joseph just make all of this stuff up, or did an actual demon, a fallen angel from heaven – actually start the Mormon religion? I think it's probably both: Joseph Smith was an ungodly liar, a known drunk, and an immoral adulterer and child rapist (as was Mohammed) – that's on historical record (I will send you an article on Mormonism that you can take some time to read.)– but all of that made him a likely candidate to listen to the doctrines of demons.

But I absolutely believe that those poor folks who have been deceived by the Mormon Church are under the sway of spiritual forces they aren't even aware of. How else can you explain that millions of Mormons would believe this stuff? And many of them know this stuff. They still won't leave it. Paul explains it—

➤ 2 Corinthians 4:4 ⁴In their case 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.

Beloved, we are engaged in an intense and unrelenting spiritual warfare, even this morning. We must be serious, and sober-minded about getting the Gospel right! When we do, it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes it. When we get the Gospel right, it can conquer the hearts of Muslims and Mormons – and it has! When we get the Gospel right, this is what happens—

➤ 2 Corinthians 4:6 ⁶For 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.

I read a story this week about a girl who was a 6th generation Mormon. It was all she had ever known, but it left her empty. Her boyfriend shared the Gospel with her, and she heard it, but didn't really hear it, until the night God called her—

On my 21st birthday, after consuming large quantities of alcohol, I spent the night fending off drunk guys who wanted to take me home. I steadied a friend's forehead as she vomited into the toilet of a urine-soaked bathroom. I craved a different kind of life.

That same December night, I returned home and fell face-down before God. With fists clenched and tears streaming, I offered each addiction to him, inviting him to have his way in my heart, my mind, and my body. I asked him to free me to live fully surrendered to Jesus, the one who gives life. And then I slept.

When I awoke the next morning, I felt *born again*, as if God had performed a total heart and mind transplant. I was released from my addictions, and peace filled my entire being. The Mormon girl

inside me breathed a sigh of relief. Set free from the burden of proving myself worthy, I rested in the arms of the One who had loved me enough to cover me with worthiness all his own. And I longed to pour that love into others.