

No Other Gospel But The Gospel of Christ

Galatians 1:1-24

Key Verse: 1:6-7

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

Galatians has been called “the Magna Carte of Christian freedom.” It first set the early Christians free from Jewish legalism. Then, during the Reformation, Martin Luther’s study of Galatians, together with Romans, brought a birth of freedom to the Christian church. Luther said, “Galatians is my letter. I married Galatians. It is my Catherine” (wife). Galatians is similar to Romans, but also different. Paul wrote Romans to a church he had not visited. He explained the gospel systematically, emphasizing justification by faith. The key word of Romans is “righteousness.” On the other hand, Paul wrote Galatians to churches he had pioneered in person. He addresses a specific problem of legalism, perpetrated by “Judaizers.” The key word of Galatians is “freedom.” Paul proclaims that the gospel gives freedom from both sin and legalism. Paul explains the nature of this freedom and how we are to use it. In our times, many people assume that freedom means doing whatever they want without responsibility or consequence. This is not true freedom. In Galatians we discover true freedom and how to truly enjoy it.

In today’s passage, Paul emphasizes the uniqueness of the gospel. It is a vital truth for us. We live in a multicultural society with people of many beliefs. We practice mutual respect to coexist. It is important to respect others, for God made us all in his image. However, in the course of doing this, we must not fall into the error that all truth claims are equally valid. The gospel is the unique truth of salvation from God. In our time, there is also a strong influence from “universalism.” It is the error that all people will be saved, no matter what they believe, as long as they live with integrity and sincerity. However, Paul urges that what we believe really matters. Today Paul challenges us with a clear teaching on the uniqueness of the gospel. There is only one gospel, the gospel of Christ. We will study this chapter in three parts: the core of the gospel (1-5), the uniqueness of the gospel (6-10), and the revelation of the gospel (11-24).

I. The core of the gospel (1-5)

In verses 1-5, Paul introduces himself and greets the churches in Galatia. In doing so, he reminds them of the core of the gospel.

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Look at verse 1. **“Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead....”** Paul identified himself as an apostle. It was a special claim to represent Jesus Christ and God the Father. This gave credibility and authority to his teaching. Paul emphasized that his apostleship came not from man, but from Jesus Christ. This was an unusual element of Paul’s introduction which is not repeated in his other letters. Paul wrote this way in Galatians to counter the “Judaizers,” who said that he was not an apostle, since he was not one of Jesus’ original Twelve. They wanted to undermine Paul’s authority and discredit his message so that Galatian Christians would abandon Paul and follow them. However, Paul claimed to be an apostle. It was on the basis of his personal encounter with the Risen Christ. While Paul traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute Christians, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, **“Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”** (Ac 9:4) It was the Risen Christ. The Risen Christ overpowered Paul with love, conquering his soul, changing him from an enemy to a follower. The Risen Christ called him to be an apostle and blessed his ministry to the Gentiles abundantly. It was nothing but the work of God by the almighty power that raised Jesus from the dead. Paul may not have known the historical Jesus who lived in Galilee, but he knew the Risen Christ intimately and received his commission from Christ. On this basis, Paul claimed to be an apostle on par with the other apostles.

There is a special quality to Paul’s apostleship. He had spiritual authority from the Risen Christ to preach and explain the gospel in a way that no one else could. Paul’s special perspective greatly enriches our understanding of the gospel and its application to daily life. Paul’s letters in the New Testament carry the weight of Scripture (2 Pe 3:15-16). No one can claim to share Paul’s apostleship in regards to writing Scripture. No one can add their personal letter to the Bible claiming that it has the same authority as Scripture. However, in another respect, we can share Paul’s claim to apostleship. In Romans 1:5, Paul said, **“Through him and for his name's sake we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”** Anyone who receives Jesus as Savior has the same privilege and calling that Paul had to preach the gospel to the people of their times. We don’t need a seminary degree, only Christ’s grace of salvation and his personal calling. With this conviction and faith we can preach the gospel boldly to any person.

In verse 3, Paul blesses the Galatian churches with grace and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The basis of this blessing is the gospel.

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When we examine verses 1-5 carefully, we find that Paul shared the core of the gospel with the Galatians very eagerly, from the very beginning of his letter.

Look at verses 4-5. **“...who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”** The Bible tells us that our real problem is a sin problem. Sin is like an invisible cancer of the soul that affects every human being. It cuts people off from God, the source of life, and eats away at the goodness of God in us. Though one sin may seem like an insignificant act, it enslaves a soul permanently. For example, to look at pornography just one time, to take dangerous drugs just one time, to betray a trust just one time, to steal one small thing, and the like can lead to a lifetime bondage that brings utter ruin. Sin finally brings death and eternal punishment in hell. This is the destiny of all people, for **“...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...”** (Ro 3:23). Though people suffer greatly from sin, there is no way to solve the sin problem. Psychology cannot solve it; neither can money, technology, reason, education, willpower, or medication. We are totally helpless to solve our sin problem. Yet, while we were helpless, Jesus Christ came to rescue us. Jesus came down from heaven and lived among us as a man. By experience, he came to understand us fully and deeply. Then Jesus went to the cross and died, shedding his blood. Christ’s death paid the full price of the sins of all mankind. Then God raised him from the dead. In this way, Christ purchased our forgiveness of sins and reconciled us with God. Now we can call God “Father,” as Paul repeats in verses 1,3,4. Jesus did this to obey God’s will. God willingly sacrificed Jesus because he loves sinners. Thank you, Father God for sending Jesus to save us! Thank you, Jesus Christ, for forgiving all our sins through your death on the cross!

The gospel is not a man-made story. It has been accomplished according to the will of God. It is God’s story. So we find the core of the gospel flowing through the Bible from the beginning to the end. Right after Adam’s fall, God promised to send an offspring of woman who would crush the head of Satan (Gen 3:15). God promised Abraham that through his offspring all nations on earth would be blessed (Gen 12:3). God promised David to raise up from his offspring an eternal king who would reign on the throne of an eternal kingdom (2 Sam 7:13-16). Christ fulfilled all of these promises (Gal 3:8; Lk 1:32). Isaiah foretold that Christ would be pierced for our transgressions and wounded for our healing (Isa 53:5). John the Baptist said of Jesus, **“Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”** (Jn 1:29). Jesus repeatedly foretold his suffering, death and resurrection (Mk 8:31; 9:12; 9:31; 10:33-34) for the salvation of mankind. Peter and John proclaimed the forgiveness of sins through the death of Christ and eternal

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life through his resurrection (Ac 2:38; Jn 3:16 et al.). The gospel may have been stated most clearly by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3b,4. It says, “...**that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...**” This is the core of the gospel. By this gospel we are saved, when we hold firmly to its truth.

II. The uniqueness of the gospel (6-10)

In most of his letters, Paul thanks God for working in his audience and offers words of appreciation for them. Even in writing to the problem-filled Corinthian church he thanks God for working among them and admits that they are a very gifted community (1 Cor 1:4-7). But he does not do this with the Galatians. Instead, right after greeting them he begins to rebuke them. It was to bring them back to their senses. Then Paul challenged them to believe the uniqueness of the gospel of Christ.

Let’s read verses 6-7. **“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”** Paul uses strong language to awaken a sense of problem in the Galatians. He says they have deserted God; they have turned to a different gospel; they are confused by those who have perverted the gospel. To understand the seriousness of their condition, we need to compare “the gospel of Christ” that Paul preached with “a different gospel” that the Judaizers preached.

Paul had preached the gospel of Christ to the Galatian believers on his first mission journey. The Book of Acts tells us how the Holy Spirit led Paul and Barnabas to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Ac 13-14). While the context of his message differed from place to place, the essence of Paul’s message was that Christ died for our sins and God raised him from the dead. Whoever believes in Christ receives forgiveness of sins and is justified by God (Ac 13:26-41). Many Gentiles accepted this message and received eternal life through Christ. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church, committed them to the Lord, and returned to Syrian Antioch.

In Paul’s absence, some people, called “Judaizers,” came into the churches in Galatia. They taught new Gentile believers that faith in Christ was not enough. They said that unless the Gentiles were circumcised, and obeyed Moses’ law, they would not be saved (Ac 15:1). This is what Paul calls “another gospel.” The

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Judaizers added an element of human work to the work of Christ as a matter of salvation. At first glance this may not seem to be a serious matter. The Judaizers did not deny Christ; they claimed to believe in Christ. But they added something to the gospel. To Paul, it was so serious that he called it “perverting the gospel.”

Here we must realize that salvation comes totally from what Christ has done for us, not from anything we have done. All we do is believe in Christ. There is nothing we can add to the work of Christ. So we cannot claim any credit for our salvation. All glory belongs to Christ, and to God the Father who sent him. However, in our times, there are people who claim we must add something to the gospel. Some say that unless one is baptized in their church, that person is not saved. Others claim that some kind of specific spiritual experiences must accompany salvation. They are all adding to the gospel. We can also add to the gospel by taking pride in ourselves or our works. Some think they will go to heaven because they donate money to charity, volunteer at homeless shelters, pray at set times of the day, skip meals, make pilgrimages to holy sites, or spare the lives of insects. Some think they will merit heaven by being tolerant and supportive of others without discernment of good and evil. A popular video called “Firework,” proposes the image that anyone can be a spark that inspires others by just being themselves, overcoming inhibitions. This is a kind of other gospel that emphasizes the authenticity of being as the way of salvation. It ignores the problem of sin and the need to be cleansed. We should remember that we are sinners, nothing but sinners, helpless to save ourselves. Yet God, in his great mercy, saved us through Christ by his grace. We are not saved because of anything we do. We are not saved because we write Bible testimonies, eat Daily Bread, deliver messages, teach the Bible well, evangelize students, go as missionaries, or endure UBF training for 30 years. These can be very helpful to our spiritual lives, but they do not merit our salvation. We are not saved because we have a title or position in the church, such as pastor, elder, missionary, shepherd, fellowship leader, or prayer servant. We are saved by Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone, for the glory of God alone. When we receive the gospel of God's grace it makes us thankful; it makes us humble; it fills us with love and inspires us to love God because he first loved us. But when we add any human effort to the gospel of Christ it makes us proud, self-righteous and ungrateful.

The temptation to magnify human merit along with Christ is very strong. It is also very deceptive. While sounding good, it leads people away from the gospel of Christ. When sinners glorify their polluted works God is greatly offended, perhaps more than he is by drug addiction or sexual immorality. We need to clearly discern this tendency and to regard it for the wickedness that it is. In verses 8-9

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Paul gives a strong warning. He says that no one can change the gospel of Christ, not Paul, not an angel from heaven, not anyone. Anyone who tries to change the gospel of Christ will be cursed by God--eternally condemned.

In verse 10, Paul revealed his motive in preaching the gospel so clearly. It was to please God. Paul rebuked sin in sinful men, magnified the grace of Christ and the mercy and love of God, and challenged people to repent and believe. This did not please people. In fact, it sometimes made people angry. However, this gave glory to God. When God was glorified, Paul was satisfied. Paul knew that salvation comes only from God, only through the gospel of Christ. So he preached it clearly, regardless of human response. In this part we mainly learn that the gospel is God's unique message of salvation for sinful men. It is the only way God has provided for people to be saved. We must hold on to the gospel of Christ alone, regardless of other ideas that are circulating and regardless of people's response to the gospel. We must also teach and influence others to do the same.

III. The revelation of the gospel (11-24)

In this part, Paul tells us why the gospel he preached is true and how he received it. It was to help the Galatians come back to the true gospel.

Look at verses 11-12. **“I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.”** Here Paul clearly explains why the gospel of Christ is unique. It is because it came from God, not men. Who is God? God is the Creator and we are creatures. God is holy and we are fallen sinners. God is perfect and we are full of mistakes. God is eternal and the source of all wisdom and we are but a mist that appears for a while then vanishes. So we must respect God's words more than our human ideas. Paul received the gospel which came from God by the direct revelation of Christ. Paul did not formulate a theory from his Jewish education. He was not taught it by some guru. It was revealed to him directly by Jesus Christ. Christ revealed what Paul could never have figured out by himself. Paul simply received the revelation and passed it on. Since the gospel Paul preached was nothing but Christ's revelation, it was the true gospel.

In verses 13-17, Paul shares his personal testimony. He was once a zealous Jew who was crazy for Moses' law. He was just like the Judaizers. He wanted to destroy the church of God, thinking it was a dangerous cult. It was beyond imagination that he would be a gospel preacher. However, God called him by grace

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and revealed his Son in Paul. Paul became the most prominent gospel preacher. Only God could do this. After meeting Christ, Paul did not seek human confirmation of the gospel or of his calling. Rather, he went to Arabia and stayed there for three years. He must have spent time in prayer and deep Bible study to harmonize his overwhelming experience of Christ with the Scriptures. He came to know the gospel by Christ's revelation, without help from the other apostles. He stood purely on faith in Christ's revelation to him. This emphasizes that his authority to preach came directly from Christ, not through the other apostles or the Jerusalem Church.

In verses 18-24 Paul clarifies his relationship with the other apostles and the Judean believers. Paul had visited Jerusalem. He met Peter and stayed with him for fifteen days. He also met James, the Lord's brother. Paul had fellowship with them, but he was not taught by them. Paul met them as a coworker in the gospel, not as their student. Later Paul went to Syria and Cilicia. The churches of Judea remembered Paul as an enemy of the gospel before he met Christ. But they heard that the man who formerly persecuted them was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. They realized that only Christ could bring about such a change. So they praised God for his work in Paul. This was further evidence that Paul had been changed by Christ and called by Christ. Paul wanted the Galatians to recognize Christ's work in him and to come back to the gospel.

In this study we have mainly learned the core of the gospel and the uniqueness of the gospel. Christ died for our sins and rose again from the dead. When we believe this we are saved, solely by what Christ has done for us. We can add nothing to Christ's work. We only humbly accept what he has done for us by faith. This gospel came from God and is the only way of salvation that God has provided. There is no other gospel. We must hold to the gospel of Christ alone and help others to do the same. Let's pray to do so in this new year.