

Galatians

No Other Gospel!

Galatians 1:6-10

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Scripture

Today we continue our study in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

I have previously expressed my view that Martin Luther's *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* was extremely influential in Western Civilization. When the first English edition of Luther's *Commentary* was published in 1575, the translators assured their readers that among the many other godly English books, they would find few as useful as Luther's *Commentary*.

The reason Luther's *Commentary* was so useful is because he understood the gospel in a new, fresh and powerful way.

The problem Luther faced in the 16th century was the same problem that the apostle Paul faced in the 1st century. They were both dealing with people who were distorting the gospel. Luther found Paul's explanation of the gospel powerfully helpful. Rather than there being many different gospels, there is no other gospel than the one Paul preached.

Let us read how Paul expressed himself in Galatians 1:6-10:

⁶ 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— ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-10)

Introduction

The early Roman writers have given us a very clear picture of the character of the Galatians. On the one hand, they were noted for their sharp and quick minds, prompt and vigorous action, eager impressibility, and enthusiastic craving after knowledge. On the other hand, they were also known as inconstant and quarrelsome, treacherous in their dealings, incapable of sustained effort, and easily disheartened by failure.

There is one aspect of their character, however, that seems to fit very well with Paul's description of the Galatians that emerges in his letter to the Galatians. It is their *desire for change*.

Julius Caesar, in his *Gallic Wars*, mentions that this character trait was the great difficulty against which he had to contend in his dealings with the Galatians. He complained that the Galatians, with scarcely an exception, were driven by a desire for change.

It seems to me that this character trait—the desire for change—is descriptive of many in America today. You may recall that Bill Clinton ran his first Presidential campaign in 1996 on this very issue: *change!* He argued that people want change. Change in leadership. Change in the economy. Change in values. Change in almost every arena of life. And, of course, he won.

Even Christians are not immune to this desire for change. Denominational loyalty, for example, is a thing of a bygone era. If people don't like the denomination, the preacher, the music, the building, the (fill in the blank), they simply change churches.

It is this desire for change that has led some people to speak of Americans as the Galatians among the nations.

In Galatians 1:6-10, the apostle Paul mentions the word “**gospel**” five times (in vv. 6, 7a, 7b, 8, and 9). That tells us that Paul is talking about the **gospel** in this section. It also tells us that the **gospel** is extremely important for Paul.

In fact, Paul says to the Galatians, “**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” (1:6, 7a). The main point that Paul makes in this section is this: There is only one gospel! There is no other gospel! Do not change the true gospel for a false gospel!

Paul makes some exceedingly strong statements about those who would like to change his gospel. For example, he says in verse 8: **“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!”**

Then, to emphasize his point, he repeats himself in verse 9: **“As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!”**

Surely we must ask: Why such strong and unyielding language?

First, Paul perceived that the glory of Christ was at stake. The gospel is a gospel of grace. It is the good news about Jesus Christ and his penal, substitutionary sacrifice for sinners. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes it (cf. Romans 1:16). And so, to add anything to the finished work of Christ is to degrade the cross. It is to declare that the cross is superfluous and perhaps even redundant. To make any work necessary for salvation is to dishonor the gospel of Christ. As Paul himself said later to the Galatians, “If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” (2:21).

And, second, Paul correctly perceived that the souls of men were at stake. The gospel is not some trivial topic. It is the means by which the Holy Spirit brings salvation to our souls. To hold false views about the gospel is to hold false views about the deepest question of all human life, which is our relationship to God. But worse than *holding* false views of the gospel is *teaching* false views of the gospel, thereby misleading others about the truth of salvation. Paul is deeply concerned about our souls, and so any attack upon our souls really got him agitated and stirred up.

We live in a society that considers it intolerant and narrow-minded to express strong views. To disagree sharply with others is

frowned upon. As for actually desiring false teachers to fall under the curse of God and be treated as such by the church is inconceivable to many. “But,” as commentator John Stott says, “If we cared more for the glory of Christ and for the good of the souls of men, we too would not be able to bear the corruption of the gospel of grace.”

Lesson

In Galatians 1:6-10 Paul expresses in the strongest possible language that there is no other gospel!

Well, what is this gospel? And how do you know if this gospel has come into your life? What are some of the characteristics of this gospel?

Paul uses a couple of key terms that help us to know what the gospel is. (I gleaned these from Dr. Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church.) These are not the only terms that teach us about the gospel, but they are the ones that help us in this text.

I. The Gospel Has Power

First, the gospel has power.

We see this in the word **called** in verse 6. Paul says, “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.”

Paul uses the Greek word *kaleo* from which we get our English word “called.” However, there is a vast difference between God’s call and our call. There is a distinction between God’s words and our words.

Our words are essentially powerless. They have no power in and of themselves to effect change. There is a difference between word and power, word and reality, word and actuality.

Let me give you an example. You have got dinner on the table and you shout to your little four-year old, “Come to dinner!”

And from the bedroom you hear, “Coming!”

But what happens? Nothing!
So, you call again, “Dinner’s ready!”
And a little voice says, “Okay!”
But still nothing happens!
You see, your child says, “Coming!” but he doesn’t come. He says, “Okay!” but nothing happens. He says, “I’ll be right there!” but he doesn’t come.

And until you go into his room and physically pick him up and bring him to the dinner table, your call has done nothing.

You see, your call is a mere call. Your word has no power in itself. Your word has no action. Your word is not efficacious.

From your child’s perspective, he hears but he doesn’t respond. He talks but he doesn’t do anything.

Now, contrast our words with God’s words. God speaks and it is done.

God says, “Let there be light,” and there was light (Genesis 1:3).

Jesus says to the raging storm, “Quiet! Be still!” and the wind died down and it was completely calm (Mark 4:39).

Jesus says to the man stricken with leprosy, “Be clean!” And immediately the leprosy left him (Luke 5:13).

God’s words are powerful. In fact, the word of God is a word of power. When God calls a person to himself, that person will come because it is God himself who is effectually calling him.

In answer to the question, “What is effectual calling?” the *Westminster Shorter Catechism Q/A 31* says, “Effectual calling is the work of God’s Spirit, whereby, convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ, and renewing our wills, he doth persuade and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.”

The gospel is the word of power. Paul wrote to the Romans and said, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it *is* the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16).

God’s calling does not have to be dramatic. When Jesus called Lazarus back to life, that was dramatic (John 11:43-44). But

when Jesus called the disciples to follow him, that was very undramatic (Mark 3:13-14).

Here is the test. You know that gospel is in your life if you sense God's calling. It doesn't have to be very dramatic. You simply sense that God is dealing with you. You know that you are a changed person. You sense a power in your life. You know that God is present in your life. You sense that you are a new creation. You know that you are no longer the person you used to be.

You are not the same person when God calls you because the gospel has power.

II. The Gospel Has Content

Second, the gospel has content.

We see this in a number of words that Paul uses. The words **confusion** (1:7), **pervert** (1:7), and **accepted** (1:9) all imply that the gospel has content.

The Galatians **accepted** the gospel that Paul preached to them. But then the false teachers came along and perverted the gospel, and that threw the Galatians into **confusion**.

Paul said that the false teachers were "trying to **pervert** the gospel of Christ" (1:7). The word **pervert** in Greek means "to change or to reverse." In fact, the false teachers were radically changing the essential character of the gospel.

The fact is that the gospel has content. Some people say that the gospel is narrative, that it is story, that it is experience. The truth is that the gospel *is* narrative, it *is* story, and it *is* experience, but it is *more than* narrative, story, and experience. It is propositional. It has content. And it is summarized by the word **grace**.

The word **grace** teaches us that God receives undeserving sinners to himself because of his love and not because of anything that we have done. As the result of receiving this grace, I live a good life. Or, I could say that I receive grace and then do works. Grace results in works.

The false teachers reversed this order. That is the perverted gospel they were teaching. They said that I must live a good life, which will bring me the grace of God. I must do good works in order to receive the grace of God. Works results in grace.

Because the gospel has content, because the gospel is propositional, it matters which order we put grace and works. The gospel is always, always by grace. There is nothing I must do in order to receive the gospel. I simply believe and receive all that God has done for me in Christ.

When you understand this truth, you are starting to get the gospel. People say, “I never heard that before.” Or, “How could I have missed that?” Or, “I have been to church all my life, but this is the first time I have heard it.” Or, “I thought I understood the gospel, but I didn’t.” There is an illumination that takes place as you understand the gospel. You understand that you are saved by grace through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Tim Keller tells the story of sitting in a meeting some years ago listening to prospective church planters share their testimony. Each one came in and said something like the following: “I was raised in a church, but I never heard the gospel. Later when I went off to college I heard that the gospel is about God’s grace and my life was changed.”

After about the fifth church planter had shared his testimony, an old minister got up and said, “Before you think ill of all these churches that don’t preach the gospel, let me tell you a story.” And then he told them about how he came to receive God’s grace.

He said, “I grew up in a church where I never heard the gospel. Then I went off to college, which was a military college. After a couple of years in college I was radically converted through the ministry of the college chaplain. I remember saying to the chaplain, ‘Why hasn’t anyone told me this before? Preachers are not preaching the gospel. Even the great Martin Luther did not preach the gospel.’

“At that statement the chaplain said, ‘What do you mean?’

“I told him that I took a course in my first year on religion. I wrote a paper on Christianity. I even read Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians* and he did not have the gospel there.

“The chaplain said to me, ‘Go and read Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians* again and let me know what you find.’

“So I went and got my copy of Luther’s *Commentary on Galatians*, and there on every page, underlined and highlighted by my own hand was the gospel!”

Some young people growing up here at Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church may one day say, “I never heard the gospel at the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church. But now I have heard it and I understand it!” And then I will know that they have got the gospel.

Friends, you know you have got the gospel when you understand grace! You understand that the gospel has content. You understand that the gospel is receiving God’s grace, from which good works result. The gospel is not doing good works in order to earn God’s grace.

II. The Gospel Is a Relationship

And finally, the gospel is a relationship.

You see this when Paul says in verse 6, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting **the one** who called you by the grace of Christ.”

Although the gospel has content, it also involves a relationship. The gospel is not only theological, it is also experiential.

There is a relational aspect to the gospel. God has created us in order to be in relationships. That is why we crave love and want to be loved. God has supremely demonstrated his own love for us in the gospel.

God himself came down to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Why? Why did God to earth? Because God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

It is because of God's love that he came down to earth to save you and me. And all you have to do is believe in the person and work of Jesus in order to be saved.

Here is how you know whether or not you have the gospel. Do you believe that God loves you for what you do? If you believe that, you do not have the gospel.

Or, do you believe that God loves you for who you are and not because of what you do or have done? If you believe that, then you have got the gospel!

And when you get the gospel, when you understand and receive God's grace, you get God himself! Getting the gospel is getting God!

Friend, you know you have the gospel when you understand that the gospel is a relationship, and it is a relationship with your Savior. You know you have a relationship with God when you spend time with him or, at least, you want to spend time with him.

I met my wife Eileen almost 20 years ago in Chicago, IL. We met August 3, were engaged on September 13, and got married on December 14! During the first weeks of meeting Eileen I wanted to spend every possible moment with her. I remember that within a few weeks of meeting Eileen she had to go to and speak at Columbia Bible College in Columbia, SC. She was gone for only four or five days. I couldn't wait for her to return. When Eileen returned from Columbia she told me that she was considering interviewing for a position at Columbia that she had been asked to interview for. I was flabbergasted! I remember telling her, "Eileen, while you were gone I felt a physical ache not having you nearby. Now that I have you, I am never going to let you go!"

Well, when you get the gospel, you get God. And when God is in your life, you have an incredible desire to spend time with him. You long to spend time with him. You want to get to know him. You want to know his thoughts. You want to know how he feels about you. And you want to tell him your thoughts and how you feel about him. And if that is your desire, you have the gospel in your life.

Like the Psalmist you say, “My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God” (Psalm 84:2).

Conclusion

So, the gospel has power. The gospel has content. And the gospel is a relationship.

You know you have the gospel in your life if sense that you are different, that you understand grace and that God is present in your life and you desire to spend time with him.

Do you have the gospel in your life?

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

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