

Subject: *Defining and Defending the Gospel*

Scripture: *Galatians 1:1-12*

The church must always define and defend the gospel. As Israel was God's appointed custodian and guardian of the OT Scriptures, so the church is the custodian and guardian of the NT and the gospel of Christ. When Paul wrote this letter the gospel was under attack, and it has always been attacked. Sometimes the attack comes from outside the church and sometimes from within the church. The church must always be ready to explain the true gospel and expose all false gospels. A lot has changed since the days of Paul and the NT, but that has not changed. So we need to understand the issues and be ready and willing to stand for the truth.

1. Paul's calling (vs. 1-5)

He identifies himself as an apostle (one sent by God). He was a messenger of the gospel.

A. His special ministry

He was called to be an apostle by Jesus Christ and God the Father. His calling was not by men, but by God. As an apostle he had special authority. The church was built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The church received and held to the apostles' doctrine (teaching). Some heard the apostles in person and some had the apostle's doctrine in the Scriptures.

B. His special message

This was a letter sent to the churches in Galatia, a region in Asia Minor (Turkey). Paul begins this letter in typical fashion with a reference to grace and peace from God the Father and Christ the Lord. What is really striking about Paul's introduction is what is missing: no word of thanks or appreciation and nothing personal about his relationship with these churches. The tone is impersonal and official and down-to-business.

2. Paul's concern (vs. 6-7)

These churches had been removed from the true gospel to another gospel, a false gospel. Paul's concern was to define the true gospel, to defend it from all attacks, and to warn these churches to what had happened. Paul's concern begs two questions: What is the gospel of Christ? He answers this in verse 4 and verses 11-12. What is the other gospel to which he refers? This is not another of the same kind, but another of a different kind. It is a perverted gospel in which some were taking the true gospel and making something else out of it. Paul was always concerned about explaining the true gospel and exposing all false gospels.

A. The one true gospel

In 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 Paul lays out the three essential elements of the gospel. Here he refers to several truths associated with the one true gospel. In verse 3, he refers to grace and peace. We are saved by grace and therefore we have peace with God. In verse 6 Paul mentions the grace of Christ. The one true gospel is the gospel of grace (God's unmerited favor). We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

In verse 4 he refers to the death of Christ (who gave himself for our sins) and the purpose is to deliver (rescue) us from this present evil world.

Titus 2:11-14 ¹¹ *For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹² Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³ Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; ¹⁴ Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

In verses 11-12 Paul writes that this was not a gospel from man, but from Christ when he was on the road to Damascus.

B. Other false gospels

Paul was not only called to preach the true gospel, but he was also called to defend it.

Philippians 1:17 *I am set for the defense of the gospel.* He defended the true gospel by exposing other false gospels. At that time Paul exposed the false gospel of legalism that a person was saved not just by believing in Christ, but also by keeping Jewish laws. In our day we have the false gospel of Mormonism and the false gospel of Catholicism. These are some of the false gospels we encounter today:

- 1) The superficial gospel – says that man doesn't need a birth from above, but a boost from below. People need a better life instead of a new heart. The worst form of badness is human goodness when it is a substitute for the new birth.
- 2) The social gospel – says that people mainly need help with their physical problems; it is enough to feed the hungry and help the needy. The problem is that people need more than soup and soap; they need salvation. The social gospel is a perversion of the true Gospel because it deals only with the problem of suffering and not with the greater problem of sin.
- 3) The success gospel – says that the purpose of Christ is to make life better; every believer should be healthy & wealthy; this is the gospel of name it and claim it theology.
- 4) The synthetic gospel – a mixture of law and grace; trust Christ and do your best; obey the golden rule and the ten commandments; in some cases the gospel of Christ is mixed with the teachings of cult leaders or other religions; the teaching of the Roman Catholic church is a synthetic gospel (Christ and the sacraments of the church; the Scriptures and church tradition)
- 5) The seeker-sensitive gospel – tells people what they want to hear and gives them what they want instead of what they need; doesn't mention sin or judgment or hell because that turns people off.
- 6) The self-help gospel – teaches that Christ gives you a good start, but you can lose your salvation if you're not careful; it is based on a wrong idea of sin, the work of Christ, and the nature of salvation

3. Paul's condemnation (vs. 8-9)

Some people would have a problem with the language Paul uses here, but remember he is writing as an apostle authorized by God. What he has written is still valid today, and we stand upon it as God-inspired truth.

- A. A comprehensive warning – Paul writes “we or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel...if any man preach any other gospel.”
- B. A clear warning – “let him be accursed” (condemned to hell) because they are guilty of poisoning people with false teaching which amounts to murdering a person's soul.
- C. A confident warning – Paul had one goal, and that was to please God. He was the servant of Christ and therefore accountable to Christ. Paul feared God, not man. Paul lived by what he wrote in ***Romans 14:12*** *So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.*