

Galatians: Faith Alone in Christ Alone

No Other Gospel (Galatians 1:1-10)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn to HCC on May 12, 2024

Introduction

- ❖ We're beginning a new sermon series today that will take us through the book of Galatians. This is one of the earliest letters by the Apostle Paul – if not the earliest. The approximate date is still debated because there are differing opinions as to how the events he mentions – specifically his visits to Jerusalem (1:18; 2:1-10) – how they correspond to Luke's recounting of events in Acts. We'll get into some of those questions later in this series.
 - **But the point I'm trying to make is that this letter was written very early in the life of the Church.** At the point where Christianity was just beginning to spread beyond Jerusalem and Judea and into Gentile territory. What began as a messianic sect within Judaism was now crossing ethnic and cultural boundaries. Gentiles (non Jews) were now hearing the gospel and embracing it for themselves.
 - **So you can understand why, at this point in the life of the Church, there was confusion over whether these new Gentile believers need to embrace Judaism.** If they want to be included within the Abrahamic covenant and join the people of God, then do these Gentiles need to adopt the identity markers of an Israelite? Do their men need to be circumcised? Do they need to observe Sabbath? Do they need to keep kosher? At this stage in church history, such questions were still being asked. There was still confusion.

- ❖ **It's that confusion that occasioned the writing of this letter.** Most of Paul's letters were addressed to one church in a specific city. But Galatia was not a city. It was a Roman province on the southern end of the land mass known as Asia Minor. This was a letter to "*the churches of Galatia.*" That would include churches in cities like Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Pisidian Antioch. Paul and Barnabas visited these cities in their first missionary journey.
 - Well, ever since that journey, rival teachers had arrived on the scene, claiming to represent the apostles in Jerusalem. Claiming that the gospel Paul preached to them needs correction. That his gospel is watered-down. That he **subtracted** essential things like the sign of circumcision.
 - Paul, in this letter, is accusing these rivals of **adding** to the gospel. Arguing that circumcision – and the overall observance of Mosaic Law – is not an essential component of the gospel. **Paul is going to argue that what's essential for your salvation is faith alone, in Christ alone, by God's grace alone.** That's the main argument in this letter.

- ❖ **The book of Galatians is about gaining a clear grasp of the gospel and having the courage to defend the gospel against any attempt to subtract from it or to add to it.** This has always been the case. Whether the heresy you're dealing with is ancient or modern. **This is how you end up losing the true gospel. Either by subtraction or addition.** By denying or downplaying some central truth of the gospel. Or by requiring certain beliefs or practices as a way to supplement the gospel. Either way – by subtraction or addition – the gospel is lost. And sinners remain lost in their sin.

- ❖ **So here in Galatians, you have two sets of rival teachers, each accusing the other of teaching another gospel other than the true gospel.** And what Paul does is provide the backstory to how he received the gospel he preaches. And he's going to argue that this gospel – which the Galatians initially received – is the true one. That he subtracted nothing from it. Rather, it's these rivals who added something.
 - So what did they add? The entire letter tries to answer that question. This morning we're only looking at chapter 1:1-10. It's the greeting and thanksgiving sections that you would typically expect in an ancient letter. **But we'll see how these few verses already foreshadow all of the various issues and arguments to come.**
 - In our text, we'll see (1) The content of the gospel. (2) The challenges to the gospel. (3) The courage gained from the gospel.

The Content of the Gospel

- ❖ Let's begin by looking at the greeting section of this letter found in vv1-5. *"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."*
 - These two verses hint at the trouble brewing in Galatia. As we mentioned, these rival teachers were claiming continuity with the Jerusalem church and the gospel preached there. **We'll see, later in this letter, that Paul has to combat the accusation that he had intentionally watered down the gospel that he learned from the Jerusalem apostles.** From pillars of the faith like Peter or James, the brother of Jesus.
 - You can imagine these rivals going around saying, "You know, Paul was sent out by the Jerusalem church just like us. He knows the gospel requires us to keep Mosaic Law. To practice Jewish customs like circumcision. But he hid that hard truth from you. So we're here to correct his gospel – to fill in what he left out." That's the accusation going around.
- ❖ **Which is why Paul takes an unconventional approach and includes a defense of his apostleship right here in the greeting of his letter.** You'd normally expect v1 to simply read, *"Paul, an apostle,"* and move on to v2. But, right off the bat, he wants to make clear that he doesn't owe his apostleship to any group of leaders or to any single human authority. How can he be deviating from the Jerusalem apostles? Since he never learn the gospel *from* them in the first place. He was never sent *by* them. He's an apostle *of Christ*. The word apostle literally means one who is sent. In his case, he was sent *"through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead."*
 - This brief mention of the resurrection was probably Paul's way signaling the new age that Jesus ushered in through his death and resurrection. **It's the very reason why Paul treats the Law differently now. Because of Christ, we're in a new age of redemptive history.** Later in chapter 3, he's going to acknowledge that, before Christ, the Mosaic Law functioned like a guardian. And God's people were like children under the Law's strict discipline. But now, having been redeemed by the Risen Christ, we're like adult sons no longer under the guardianship of the Law.

- ❖ **There's been a transformation in how believers relate to the Mosaic Law and all its stipulations.** And it's all because of this gospel that Paul preaches. Now in v4, he is, once again, unconventional in the way he alludes to the content of the gospel even in this greeting. He greets his readers by invoking the grace and peace of 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.”*
 - **This emphasis on Christ and his sacrifice for our sins to deliver us – this simple line anticipates the entire argument of the letter.** Remember, these rival teachers are accusing Paul of distorting the gospel by subtraction. By watering it down and not requiring Gentile believers to keep Jewish Law. Not telling them to essentially become Jews – to become children of Abraham.
 - That's how they understood this new faith. **They still saw it fundamentally as a Jewish religion. That's why these rival teachers are often described as Judaizers.** That name comes from the verb ‘to judaize’. To judaize someone means to convert them to Judaism. It's like saying to Christianize someone. So for these Judaizers, their gospel was portrayed as an embrace of the Jewish way of life under Mosaic Law.

- ❖ But in v4, Paul is already moving us in a very different direction. And he's going to expound on this idea throughout the body of his letter. **In chapter 3:1, he reminds the Galatians that the gospel he preached publicly portrayed – not the Law – but Christ as crucified.** The good news is *not* that there is enough room for you Gentiles within the old covenant. It's not a welcome into the arms of the Mosaic Law.
 - No, the good news of the gospel is a welcome into the arms of Christ. Who gave himself for us. Who *“redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.” (3:13)*
 - Within the gospel – the good news that Paul preached – is first the bad news that human beings like us are, by nature, sinners who stand condemned before the just judgment of a Righteous God. Before the Law, we are cursed – in that no matter how hard we try to keep the Law, we fall short.

- ❖ **But the good news is that this same Righteous God – the One before whom we stand condemned – is loving and merciful.** And he sent his Son to deliver sinners like us from our condemnation. This Son of God came to us in the person of Jesus the Christ and was crucified for our sins. As he hung on that tree, he bore our curse. He died our death. But he didn't stay dead. He rose again on the third day.
 - **And just as Christ was raised to new life, inaugurating a new age. In the same way, all who trust in him experience newness of life.** That's why Paul can say in Galatians 2:20, *“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me, and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

- ❖ **Paul's emphasis on the newness of our life in Christ is why he advocates so strongly for a new attitude and new approach to the Mosaic Law.** The gospel is not about making room for Gentiles within the old covenant. It's about Jews and Gentiles being bound together under a new covenant. Where Christ alone is the goal of our worship. And Christ alone is the glue of our unity. That's what the gospel is all about. That's the message that Paul preached.

The Challenges to the Gospel

- ❖ So we considered the content of the gospel, which surprisingly is found even in the letter's greeting section. But now we turn to vv6-9 to consider the challenges to the gospel. Now in these verses – where the typical ancient letter contains a thanksgiving section – we're surprised not to find one. You don't read of Paul giving thanks for his readers and praying for them. It's there in Ephesians (1:15-23), in Philippians (1:3-11), and in Colossians (1:3-14).
 - But not here in Galatians. **Where you'd expect to read, "I thank God for you," instead you read, "I am astonished at you."** Look at v6, "*I 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.*"
- ❖ So what astonishes Paul is the speed to which the Galatian Christians are willing to turn from the gospel they received under Paul's ministry, which ultimately means they're deserting the God who called them in the grace of Christ. **But commentators note that the particular verb tense for "deserting" or "turning" would indicate that they're not completely gone.** The Galatians are getting dangerously close. They're on the verge of abandoning God and his gospel. But not yet. There's still hope. Which warrants Paul writing this letter.
 - Now Paul describes the message of these Judaizers as a "*different gospel.*" It's too bad he didn't explicitly spelled out the content of this different gospel. But you can still piece it together when you read this letter as a whole.
- ❖ As already noted, these Judaizers were trying to convert Gentile Christians into full-fledged, practicing Jews – but all without denying Jesus as the Christ. **They weren't denying the necessity of Christ – just the sufficiency of Christ.** They had no desire to subtract anything from the gospel of Jesus Christ. They just wanted to add to it – to supplement it. They taught that to be counted as full members of the covenant community of God and to be justified before him – to be counted righteous in his eyes – in addition to having faith in Christ, you have to observe Jewish customs. You need to be circumcised and submit to Mosaic Law.
 - **Paul goes on to say in v7 that that message is not just another version of the gospel.** It's not like theirs is a Jewish version of the gospel that includes works of the law. And Paul's gospel is a Gentile version that omits it. No, there's only one gospel and theirs is not it.
 - The one true gospel says that you are too sinful to deliver yourself. And your only hope of deliverance is in the "*grace of Christ.*" To which God powerfully calls you when you're converted. **You don't add anything to the grace of Christ.** Otherwise, it's no longer grace. And it's no longer the gospel.

- ❖ There's a pastor named Alistair Begg who puts it this way: **A Christ supplemented is a Christ supplanted.** That means if you try to supplement the grace of Christ with something – whether it's getting circumcised, or keeping kosher, or adopting a new lifestyle, or behaving a certain way, or maintaining a certain degree of discipline – whatever it is, that something will end up supplanting Christ as your final hope and confidence before God. **If you tell someone that you need to trust in the grace of Christ in the gospel AND do this or that – then whatever you've added will eventually replace the grace of Christ.** And what you're left with is not gospel. It's not good news anymore.
- ❖ Here's an example. I think it's very common for Bible-believing people, worshipping in Bible-teaching churches, to still fall victim to a subtle form of legalism. **That implicitly suggests that you are saved by your trust in the grace of Christ PLUS your devotion to him as demonstrated by your discipline of daily devotions.**
 - Churches may never say it that way, but they could give off that impression. That your only hope in life and death is *your faith* in Christ and *your faithfulness* to spend time with Christ in Bible reading and prayer.
 - Now, of course, there's nothing wrong with doing daily devotions. There's everything good about it. But just don't add it to the gospel. **A Christ supplemented – by something as good as spending devotional time with God – is eventually a Christ supplanted.**
- ❖ **Let's imagine the devil comes to trouble your soul.** He tries to destroy your peace by accusing you of sin. By pointing out your failures. By criticizing you for being a bad Christian. This is where the grace of Christ can be your hope and stay. **In these moments, you can plead the blood and righteousness of Christ.** You tell that devil that Jesus's blood has washed you clean and his righteousness has been counted as yours. That's the kind of confidence at your disposal if you're trusting in Christ alone.
 - But if you're resting in Jesus AND your devotional life, then you have a flimsy case to plead. The devil will rip you apart for all the times you skipped your devos, for all the times you treated it like a chore, for all the times you fell asleep. **The grace of Christ will be of no value to you – if you're resting on your own performance or in your own degree of devotion.** Because if you try to supplement him, you end up supplanting him. If you add to the gospel, you don't get a newer version of the gospel. You get *no* gospel. You get no good news for your soul.
- ❖ There's the one true gospel and a whole bunch of false ones. But even so. **Even as Paul insists there is only one gospel. He can still speak of “the gospel to the circumcised” as distinct from “the gospel to the uncircumcised”.** Listen to Galatians 2:7, “*On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised.*” **So how is Paul not contradicting himself?** Isn't he acknowledging two different versions of the gospel?

- ❖ I've heard it explained this way. Think of a diamond. **It's one diamond. But depending on how clear it is and how it's cut, you can turn it around and look at it from different angles.** And depending on the angle you're looking from, its brilliance will shine differently. Refracting light in one direction or another. But it's still just one brilliant diamond.
 - **In the same way, there's only one gospel.** But whenever you preach it or share it, you'll rarely have the time to share everything there is to say about the gospel. You'll have to make a choice – usually depending on the context of the people you're speaking to – about which angle you're going to take in presenting the one gospel.

- ❖ When Paul says Peter was entrusted with “*the gospel to the circumcised*,” he meant Peter was tasked with preaching the one gospel primarily to Jews. To the religious. **Now when you're sharing the gospel with religious people who have a clear sense of morality – of right and wrong – you'll probably take an angle that emphasizes sin as lawbreaking.**
 - You're going to appeal to their sensitive guilty consciences. You want to bring the conviction of sin and yet, at the same time, the comfort of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Of being declared “not guilty” and pardoned by the King of Heaven.

- ❖ But if you're like Paul, then you're primarily preaching “*the gospel to the uncircumcised*.” To the Gentiles. **That means to the irreligious – to the pagan.** Now you won't get a hearing if you speak to them like you're speaking to the religious. If you claim any moral absolutes, if you tell them they're lawbreakers, if you try to convict them of guilt over their lust or greed – they'll shrug you off. They'll accuse you of imposing your morality on them. They'll say, “You have *your* standards and I have *mine*.” The point is you can't assume the irreligious are constantly burdened by guilt, longing to be told how they can get right with God.
 - **So if you're sharing the gospel with the irreligious, what's usually more effective is to present their sinfulness in terms of idolatry rather than lawbreaking.** And to try to convict them of the futility in trying to please their idols – in seeking their affirmation. And the good news they need to hear is how the right worship of the One True God offers the true joy and affirmation that they're chasing after in their idolatry.
 - And then once they start to worship Jesus as Lord, they'll begin to see the truth and beauty of the gospel from other angles. They'll see themselves as lawbreakers and come to embrace the good news of justification by faith alone. And for the religious, who enjoy the peace of God's pardon, they'll eventually need to recognize they've been making a idol of their religiosity.

- ❖ **The point is everyone will eventually need to be confronted and comforted by the whole gospel.** But their entry point might be different. They might come at it from a different angle than you. But, in the end, there's only one gospel for all of us to trust in. So you should be asking yourself: Do I understand the gospel myself? Do I have a full-orbed grasp of the gospel in all of its brilliant facets? **Or have I only been looking at the gospel from the same angle all this time?** If you feel like you need a fuller grasp, then consider reading a book like Tim Keller's *Prodigal God*, which takes a deep look at the gospel from the angle of both the religious and the irreligious.

- ❖ Brothers and sisters, this is our responsibility as the Church. **The church's job is to proclaim, protect, and pass down the gospel to future generations.** We have to stay sharp and vigilant against any efforts to either add to or subtract from the gospel. That's what I like about the new sermon series image on the front of our bulletin. **It's a creative way of depicting our Christian responsibility to carefully walk on the gospel path of faith alone in the cross of Christ alone.** Being aware that there are dangers of falling off on either side. On one side, adding to the gospel. On the other side, subtracting from the gospel.
 - **And that danger of adding and subtracting is far more serious than some might think.** Let's say a church begins to subtract from the gospel the call to repent from all sins as defined by Scripture, or they try to omit the doctrine of hell and final judgment. You might conclude, "Oh, they're just going more liberal. But at least they still preach the gospel." Or on the other end, if a church begins to add to the gospel – suggesting that you can't be a real Christian if you don't vote for this candidate or if you don't support this party. You might conclude, "Oh, they're just being really conservative. But at least they still preach the gospel."

- ❖ **We might be willing to excuse these churches as merely being too loose or too rigid in their understanding of the gospel. But Paul would say that they've abandoned the gospel and should be accursed.** Anathematized. To be placed under a curse.
 - Listen to vv8-9, *"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. 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."*

- ❖ **The Apostle Paul recognizes the true danger of preaching a amended gospel.** And he says it doesn't matter who's promoting it. Even if *he* were to return to Galatia preaching another gospel – or if an angel from heaven were to appear preaching another gospel – don't accept it. Just because someone you respect or someone who seems to be influential in Christian circles – just because they believe it, preach it, post it, or tweet it – that doesn't make it true and life-giving. Especially if what they're teaching doesn't accord with the gospel once for all delivered to the saints and recorded for us in Holy Scripture.
 - **Brothers and sisters, are you willing to walk the narrow path?** To avoid adding to or subtracting from the gospel? To avoid the teaching and influence of those who are doing just that? That means having the guts to say, "That is *not* the gospel. That is a false gospel. That kind of teaching will lead followers under a curse – under God's rightful condemnation."

The Courage Gained from the Gospel

- ❖ Those are not easy words to say. Easy to think. **But difficult to voice out loud as a warning to others who are so quickly deserting the one true gospel and turning to false ones.** But this leads to our third and final observation: The courage gained from the gospel. Listen to v10, *"For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ."*

- ❖ Paul's willingness to anathematize these false teachers in vv8-9, suddenly reminds him of the accusation that they're spreading about him. **Remember, they're saying Paul is changing his gospel to suit his audience.** If he's preaching in a synagogue to the religious – he'll include circumcision. But when he's speaking to Gentile audiences, then he'll leave it out. They're accusing Paul of people pleasing.
 - But, in v10, he's saying that his willingness to draw lines – to defend a clear presentation for the gospel; to anathematize those who add to or subtract from it – **that should be enough to demonstrate that he's not a people pleaser.** He's not seeking the approval of man. Because he knows he already has the approval of God.

- ❖ We might look at the Apostle Paul and admire his courage and boldness. The way he stands firm for the gospel. And we think, "Thank God for people like that. But that's not me. I couldn't do that. I'm not courageous like that."
 - **Friends, we don't have the luxury anymore of just watching others around the world defending the gospel.** There are challenges to the gospel near and ever present. There are countless efforts to add or subtract. So you and I need to be as courageous as the Apostle Paul.

- ❖ And that is possible. That's not asking too much of you. Because the same source of courage Paul relied on is available to us. Why was he so bold? **Why did he not crave the approval of man? Because he was secure in the approval of God.** Paul would tell you, "You can enjoy the same security of God's approval if you turn away from a reliance on yourself and put your faith and hope in Christ and Christ alone."
 - That's the message at the heart of Galatians. That's the good news we look forward to proclaiming, week in and week out, as we preach through this letter.