

“Do You Believe the True Gospel?”

Galatians 1:1-10

Perhaps the best way to introduce the Apostle Paul's letter to the Galatians is with an analogy. Let's say you did an excellent job of teaching your children about the Bible as they grew up and they came to faith in Christ, got baptized, got involved in the church as youth and young adults and were growing in the Lord. They leave home, they move away, they meet someone who claims to be a Christian who talks about faith in Jesus and believes in the death, burial and resurrection but they also say that there are other things you need to be doing in order to assure you have eternal life. Like you have to do specific activities to earn God's favour or pray in a specific manner or attend a specific building with specific ceremonies so that you know you will be one of the elect few who gets into eternal life. Then they come home and tell you, the parent, and you're like Paul in Galatians,

1:6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—

3:1 You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.

5:7 You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?

This is the atmosphere of Galatians. Paul had already travelled through the region of Galatia on his first missionary journey with Barnabas (recorded in Acts 13-14) and led people to Christ and established churches along the way. But after he left a group of Jews who were called Judaizers insisted that yes it's okay to believe in Jesus but you still have to follow the Laws of Moses; specifically, you had to be circumcised, eating or not eating certain meats and observing the Sabbath. So Jesus + these outward signs = salvation. Paul says 'No, Jesus alone saves you by the grace of God.' So the letter is Paul addressing the error, correcting it with proper biblical teaching and encouraging the Galatians that Jesus has freed you from sin's power and penalty therefore live for Christ in the Spirit's power not by your own works.

How did Paul do that? How do we do that? How do we keep each other focused on the true gospel? Paul begins, even in his introduction, with a reminder of what the true gospel is and what it does for us. Because if we only share the gospel without telling people what it can do for them now we are only giving them half a message. So Paul reminds us that

The Gospel's Purpose is to Rescue Us from Sin **(1:1-5)**

In his introduction Paul has to defend his apostleship. Most likely these Judaizers painted Paul as anti-Jewish, who even though he had been raised up according to the Laws of Moses, now having accepted Jesus as the Messiah, Paul was abandoning these laws. How can he be a true believer if he rejects the Laws God gave Moses! But Paul very clearly shows he was sent to share the gospel by the authority of God and a personal visitation from Jesus. How could you not believe Paul when he has credentials like that?

So Paul explains how the gospel's purpose is to rescue from sin ...

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus (vv.1-2)

Listen to how Paul begins his letter – not like most of the others;

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—* ² *and all the brothers with me, to the churches in Galatia:*

An apostle was one who had seen the risen Christ and spent time sitting under Jesus' teaching. While Paul wasn't one of the original twelve, he did see the risen Jesus when Jesus met him on the Damascus Road and Paul spent time under Jesus mentioned in 2 Cor. 12:1-2 and probably alluded to in Gal. 1:17. Paul defends his authority by saying I was sent by God Himself who "raised Jesus from the dead". Right away Paul reminds his audience that Jesus died and God raised Him from the dead. In v.4 he explains why but for now he makes sure that the centrality of the gospel is the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God's work through Jesus, not anything Paul did.

When Paul says 'Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' it's not just trite statement that everyone put at the beginning of their letters (like the Lord bless you!) it was a reminder that the gospel comes to us through the death and resurrection of Jesus but also

Comes by God's grace which brings us peace (v.3)

Grace means God has favoured us, bestowed us His gift freely without any work that we have done. This grace – if we accept it – gives us peace with God. We are made whole by Him through faith in the gospel. If this were Hebrew, grace and peace would be 'hesed' and 'shalom' the two most important words in the Old Testament. The Greek translation of the Old Testament usually uses *charis* for hesed and *ierene* for shalom, which is what we have here. The only way we can get peace with God is if what separates us from God – our sin – is paid for (by Jesus) and believed upon (by us). Paul says this very clearly in Rom. 5:1,

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² *through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.*

Paul prays in every opening of his letters that the believers would have grace and peace. The more we understand everything is by God's grace/hesed in our lives, the more peace/shalom we will have in life. We're calmed by God's power and presence and sovereignty.

Paul uses the introduction to his letter to remind the hearers (some of whom have strayed from a gospel of grace to a gospel of works) that the gospel's purpose is to rescue us from sin,

By the voluntary, substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus (v.4a)

³ *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,* ⁴ *who gave himself for our sins*

That word "give" explains Jesus chose to offer Himself for our sins. He took our place. The penalty for sin is separation from God. Jesus experienced a temporal separation from His Father on the cross so we who believe that His death paid the price for our sins, would never experience separation from God. In John 10:17 Jesus said,

¹⁷ The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father.”

To add some kind of works system to the gospel cheapens the cross. To add anything to the gospel is to say what Jesus did wasn't enough. To add our own efforts to the gospel lowers the value of Jesus and elevates us to the same plain as Jesus. No one can save themselves. *“It is not by works so that no one can boast”* (Eph. 2:8-9).

And the purpose of the gospel is

So That We Might Experience Victory Over Sin (1:4-5)

⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

We can't rescue ourselves from sins temptations now nor can we rescue ourselves from it forever. Only Jesus can do that for us and we must believe in Him by faith if we want final victory from the evil presence of sin forever, in God's glorious presence. And we must believe in Him now if we want spiritual victories from temptations while we exist in this present evil age. The word 'rescue' means to take out or set free.

Too often we only focus on the future rescue from sin's presence after we die when sharing the gospel. Why don't we emphasize more the gospel's appeal to have victory over sin's power now? Paul said in Rom. 6

¹¹ In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹² Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³ Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. ¹⁴ For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

When Jesus died and rose again, He defeated Satan and destroyed the power sin has over us. We give it power when we allow temptations and desires to lead us and not God's grace. People struggle with all kinds of addictions, bad choices and wrong thinking. Do we believe the gospel can rescue them from these things? Jesus died for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age. That means living above it while in it as well as being taken out of it when we die.

Wow! Paul just went over the whole gospel in his introduction as his way of pointing the people in these churches back to the truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is fully sufficient to rescue us from sin's penalty and power. But we live in a present evil age where Satan still has his hands busy trying to mislead and misdirect us. So Paul begins the main part of his letter not with his usual *'I always thank God for you because of your faith ...'* instead he writes;

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.

Unfortunately, like Paul we too have to deal with those who want to distort the gospel – remember we live in an evil age. What's the main thing to watch out for from people who distort the gospel?

Gospel Distorters Want to Downplay Sin **(1:6-10)**

Jesus died in order to rescue us from sin. But we don't like sin. Some don't even want to admit they are sinners. By not admitting we are sinners we then have no need for Jesus to save us from our sins. But in doing that we devalue the cross, belittle Jesus and inadvertently place ourselves in the position of saviour, since we think our works can save us. This is how the gospel gets distorted

By twisting grace for works (vv.6-7)

The word Paul used for 'astonished' is the same word used to describe people's responses to miracles – things that one can't humanly explain. It's like Paul's saying 'I don't understand how you could abandon Jesus alone as your Saviour and somehow think by keeping these Jewish laws (or substitute good works) will please God more than the voluntary, sacrificial, substitutionary death of His Son?' The gift of grace is rejected for a 'I can do it my own way gospel'. No doubt these Judaizers were very persuasive. 'God told Moses this is the way its done 1400 years ago. Why change now?' The word 'pervert' or distort' means to turn one thing into another. Grace is out, works is in. You can't have both. To add works to grace does not equal the gospel.

All that does is

It takes people away from God (vv.8-10)

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.

Doesn't matter who it comes from, if it doesn't agree with the true gospel of Jesus – His death and resurrection makes rescue from sin possible – then its not of God. He even repeats it. And even repeats 'eternally condemned' because eternal condemnation is separation from God. It's the result of ignoring or rejecting the gospel of Jesus Christ. If faith alone in Jesus Christ's payment for our sins unites us to God then anything other than the gospel takes people away from God.

The message of 'you can get to heaven on your own' or 'you're your own god' or 'there is no god' – all of these are false gospels – will make you popular. Will please people. You might even get your own TV show or channel. You'll sell lots of books. You'll make lots of money with that smiley face gracing the cover of all your books. How can something that nice be so wrong? But it is. It's deceptive. We live in a present evil age where Satan masquerades himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14) so we should not be astonished that the false gospels are out there. But we are astonished and people who have heard the gospel and looked like they've responded to the gospel, fall away and choose a different gospel. Because it's more popular. Or they are falsely promised they will make money or be healed or have all those problems disappear.

Paul's strategy was to come back to the truth. To remind everyone what the true gospel is. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was sent to earth by His Father to become one of us. To live a sinless life and die in our place, voluntarily to pay the ransom price to God that our sin required. Proved He was God's Son ultimately by rising from the dead so that we who believe in Him will be free from sin's

penalty in God's presence forever when we die, and have victories over sin in this life while until we die.

A great verse to memorize and apply is 2:20,

2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Jesus freed us from ourselves. Jesus freed us from the desire to try and please God by our own efforts. We please God when we live by faith, recognizing that as Jesus died for us, we are to die to self and live for Him. To please Him instead of trying to impress Him. Because we are all sinners and fall short of God's glory we can't try and impress Him with 'how good' we are since we're not.

So if you've never accepted the gift of grace in Jesus that your sins have been paid for in full, now is the time. Confess to God what He already knows, that we all sin and fall short of His glorious perfection. Yet, He in His grace chose to come to us through His Son because we can't come to Him. By grace Jesus died for us and by grace God gives us eternal life when we believe in Jesus alone for God to rescue us from sin's penalty, death. And to live a life that has purpose and can experience freedom from sin's temptations when we continue to obey God's Word believing that doing what He says brings greater joy than doing what we want.

Most of us probably have made that decision but sometimes we fall into living by works as if we still need to impress God somehow. Let's be careful to live by grace in the freedom that God's grace and peace gives us, asking forgiveness when needed, making decisions that requires faith to find that the joy that comes from obedience is the best thing we can do.

And be burdened for and pray for those you know and care about – like Paul here – who began on the right path but have chosen themselves or been misled because they listened to bad teaching and are following a 'different gospel'. Pray for them, plead with them, show them what God's Word says so that they can experience the grace and peace from God that only comes through Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us on the cross to rescues us from this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father to whom be the glory forever. Amen.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us
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