

Galatians 1:6-10: No Other Gospel

Exegetical Big Idea: The Galatians are being led astray by false teachers into “other” gospels, which are not true gospels and only lead to destruction.

Homiletical Big Idea: **Anything but the true Gospel is a hopeless pursuit for both the teachers and the hearers.**

Fallen Condition Focus: False gospels are plenty and they are often enticing because of the lure of self-righteousness or selfish gain. Any other “gospel” however only leads to death.

Intro:

How many people here have heard of LEGO? Everyone has. I’m sure that young kids and older grandparents alike have heard of LEGO, and probably played with it. LEGO was certainly one of my favorite things to play with as a kid, and now that my kids are older, they have LEGO and I like building things with them.

LEGO has been around for a long time. It started in Denmark in 1932. It didn’t truly hit its most popular phase until the 60’s and 70’s. By then, everyone knew the name LEGO and was buying LEGO. In 1961 LEGO started being sold in the U.S. and in just 10 years it was the best-selling toy on the market. And it still is, as we just saw, a well-known and well-played with toy.

Now when Lego was becoming popular, they did the smart thing and filed a patent for their product. This patent ensured that nobody would copy their product and that they would be the only ones selling these amazingly popular little bricks. That patent was a huge factor in the rise of the LEGO empire in the 60’s and 70’s.

And then 1978 happened. Guess what happened in 1978. The patent expired. They don’t last forever. Within a few years there were many companies who were building their own version of LEGO to try and cash in on the LEGO craze. Now LEGO itself obviously didn’t go out of business, but it did mean that there were LEGO clones in all the stores.

And there are still today. But nothing beats the real deal.

Whenever I’m in a thrift store or at a garage sale I will often look for LEGO to pick up for my kids. And I know that I need to look at the top of the little bricks to look for the LEGO symbol. If it’s not there, I’m not interested. There’s no replacement for the genuine thing. I only want the real deal.

There is only one genuine gospel. Paul outlined it for us in the first five verses of his letter to the Galatians. But that doesn’t stop people from trying to push counterfeit gospels. And whereas the only true gospel brings freedom in Christ and everlasting life, any other so called gospel only leads to sorrow and shame and ultimately destruction.

Last week we asked the question “can you tell the difference between the genuine gospel and a false gospel?” Today we ask “do you want the real thing?”

Because:

Anything but the true Gospel is a hopeless pursuit for both the teachers and the hearers.

If we're going to talk about the pursuit of false gospels, we have to ask the question: why on earth does anyone pursue a false gospel?

The reality is that:

Vv. 6-7a: False Gospels are sneaky and enticing

After outlining for us the foundations of the true gospel, Paul then moves on to address the false gospels going around. He begins with a note of astonishment. He writes in verse 6 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you..."

So these false teachers have come in to the churches in Galatia, which you will remember are all gentile churches with no Jewish history or background, and they are teaching that the Galatian Christians have skipped a step. They are teaching that the Galatian Christians need to first go back and become Jewish before they can become Christian, namely, that they need to be circumcised and obey all the ins and outs of the Mosaic Law.

Paul sees this as a heresy, and a breaking of the faith with God.

I think it's important to note here that Paul does indeed use some very strong language towards the Galatians. It could easily be taken that Paul understands that the Galatians have outright rejected God and have already sealed their fate in turning to this false gospel. But I don't think that's exactly what's going on. I think he's speaking in a general sense, especially since in chapter 5 he insinuates that if they continue down this road, then they will be lost.

So I think the way to understand this towards the Galatians is to understand it as Paul giving a very serious warning of what may, if not possibly already, has taken place. In other words, he fears that this might be the case, namely, that they are abandoning Christ for a false gospel.

The church has welcomed these people in they are putting up with this teaching! I think Paul is warning them in the most serious way that if you let them poison your minds and hearts, you will be lost.

And he's very serious about this. Notice what he says they are deserting in verse 6. He actually does not say they are deserting the gospel, he makes it clear that if they listen to these false teachers they are deserting God himself!

Verse 6 reads "...deserting *him* who called you in the grace of Christ". Him is God! If you reject God's gospel, you are rejecting God himself. And not only that but Paul reminds them of what God has done for them to really hammer home the point of what it means to reject God.

God has "called" them "in the grace of Christ". This is clearly a reminder that they were lost in their sin and had no interest or desire for God. They were in their in and loved it and were defiantly on their way to hell. And yet God stepped in and removed the veil over their eyes so that they could see their sin and their need for Christ. They saw the beauty of Christ and his work for them on the cross to take away their sin and the hope they can have in his resurrection and they were called into God's kingdom. Not by anything they had done, but by the gracious will of God. And God called them despite their sin and shame and gave them the free gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. They are no better than anyone else, they're not even of Jewish decent, and yet God chose to call *them*.

Reject God's gospel, and you reject that God who has done that for you.

Paul is astonished that they are trading all that in, for nothing. Lay it out like that we see how bad of a trade that is. But false gospels are sneaky and enticing.

False Gospels are sneaky because they often sound so good. These false teachers were claiming to worship Jesus just like Paul was. They were also likely teaching that Jesus is God and is the Savior of the World and that you need to believe in him to have your sins taken away. That all sounds very good. They were also Jewish, just like Paul. Doesn't Christianity have its roots in Judaism? It sure does. So these long-time devout Jewish leaders are simply saying that you can't forget about God's law and throw it out the window. After all, did God not say that circumcision would be a sign to God's people forever?

That sounds good. It's very sneaky. But it's also enticing.

It's enticing because the message is "you have to meet God halfway". And that strokes our pride. The moment even the smallest part of our salvation is up to us, we immediately will start to think how good we are.

The problem is that it's a hopeless pursuit! You can never be "good enough" for God. You have nothing to bring to God except your brokenness and sin. Christ didn't come to give you a boost to attain God's standard, he came to fulfil that standard for you.

The human heart is so fickle. We want our part in it. We want credit for it. We need to control it.

But all this is a hopeless pursuit, something that is impossible to attain.

[My kids love bubbles. We have these wands that make a huge amount of bubbles all at one time. They love to chase them and try and catch them. And they'll keep coming back for more and more and I could be all day just making bubbles for the kids. Here's a question: How long does it take to catch a bubble? We're talking a single bubble. The answer of course is...well never because it's impossible. The moment you reach out your hand to grab it it pops.]

Any so called gospel other than the real thing is just like that. Yes, it can seem enticing, but it's nothing. That's why Paul is so astonished that they are rejecting God for another gospel, not that there is another one.

I think this underscores for us the vital importance of being part of a church that understands, believes, preaches, and teaches the true gospel.

Anything but the true Gospel is a hopeless pursuit for both the teachers and the hearers.

It gets worse. It's not only that it is a hopeless pursuit to chase after a false gospel, but it has eternal consequences.

Vv. 7b-9: False Gospels send their preachers, and their hearers, to hell

Here's the first time Paul mentions these troublemakers. What we can tell here is that it seemed to be a group of them, not just one person. Paul describes them as trouble makers, and who are distorting the gospel. We've just talked a bit about how they have done that. The idea of distorting here is taking what is true and changing it into something different. They aren't throwing out what Paul is saying altogether, they changing it. But the result is that by changing it even a little, it is fundamentally different.

By distorting it, they are destroying it. And they are doing it on purpose. This is not a matter of miscommunication or misunderstanding. Paul is very clear here that they “want” to distort the gospel in verse 7.

Well if these false teachers are intentionally trying to lead astray and muddy the message of the gospel, Paul certainly has other intentions. He wants to be as clear as possible.

Paul makes it very clear the consequence of such actions. Paul writes in verse 8 that even if he and his companions, or even an angel should preach a gospel contrary to the one already preached, that such a person or being is cursed.

This is strong language on a number of fronts. First of all this term “cursed” is not simply Paul trying to insult the false teachers or wishing them bad luck. This word means that such a person who intentionally distorts the gospel and leads others astray with such a message is in danger of eternal damnation in hell.

And Paul is so serious about this that he includes himself in this! Remember back in the opening verses of the book when Paul is defending his apostleship. We talked about how Paul was not doing that for pride, but for the sake of the message of Christ. Here’s more proof of that. Paul is using a hypothetical situation here to show the seriousness of the message of Jesus. Paul is saying “I’m not in this for myself, because I could wish that I would be cut off from Christ if I find myself to be preaching a gospel that does not lead to Christ”.

Verse 9 at first glance seems to be just a repeat of what Paul has said, but it’s a little bit different. There’s a grammatical difference between these two verses in the original language. Verse 8 is hypothetical, but verse 9 is more of a statement. Paul is directly calling out the false teachers in verse 9. Paul is saying that *if* he were to be teaching a false gospel, then his fate would be damnation, and therefore if these false teachers are doing the same thing, then their fate is damnation.

All of this points to the fact that the gospel cannot be changed. Twice in these verses Paul uses the term “contrary to...” the gospel that was preached and received.

If it is true that the good news of Christ, namely that Christ died to take our sins, that we receive forgiveness of our sins if we believe in it, that Jesus rose to life again and secures for his people eternal life, if that Gospel does not change (and it doesn’t), then it is the same yesterday today and for all of time.

It means that adding anything to the gospel corrupts it.

[I remember camping with a friend and his family when I was younger. His dad was making burgers on a camping stove for dinner. Well on the way to the BBQ, some of the burgers fell off the plate and onto the ground. The campsite we were on was one of the sites that you can drive your vehicle into, and those spots tend to be well worn by all the people using the site and so on the actual site was not much grass, but instead mostly dirt and sand. Well the burgers fell right into that, and we rinsed them off as best we could but cooked them anyways. The question was who would get the burgers that fell on the ground and who would get one that hadn’t. Well I got on that *had* fallen on the ground and it was easy to tell because every bite was gritty in the teeth. You may say “it’s just a few grains of sand”, but those little additions to the burger completely ruined it.]

Salvation in Christ is a free gift and we can offer God nothing. Adding church attendance to that ruins the gospel. Adding baptism to that ruins the gospel. Adding good works to that ruins the gospel. Don't get me wrong, Christians should do all those things and more, but not to earn salvation. We should do those things out of a *response* to the salvation we already have in Christ.

Just as adding anything to the gospel ruins it, so does subtracting from the gospel. And this is probably more what we are seeing in our day and age.

[As a youth pastor I order a lot of pizza. One youth event a few years ago I ordered something like 10 pizzas. Nowadays I can do it all from my phone to make the process easier. So I place my order and I get a call about 10 minutes later from the pizza store. They ask me if my order is correct. I thought it was, but then the guy informs me that I ordered all the pizzas without cheese. There must have been something wrong with the ordering software because I definitely did not do that on purpose! The guy was nice and changed the order so that all the pizzas did in fact get cheese. But the guy called me because how unusual it is to get a pizza without cheese! Let alone 10 of them. How do you even have pizza without cheese? A pizza without cheese is just tomato bread. Nobody wants that.]

We live in a time where the gospel is presented without the actual gospel. I've heard people say that the gospel is love. That the gospel is like a hug from God. That the gospel is that God says you are good. That the gospel is acceptance no matter who you are or what you do. The gospel is that you don't need to change because God loves you just the way you are.

Those sound really nice don't they, except that they're all false. The temptation for subtracting from the gospel is taking out things we don't like to hear, like sin and repentance and the fact that we are all rebellious against God and deserving of his wrath. We don't like to hear that or lives are not our own but that we belong to God and exist for his glory and not our own.

With so many false gospel swirling around today, just as there was back then, it really underscores the importance again being part of a gospel preaching church. We must not be ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for those who are being saved.

We must preach the bad news of sin and rebellion and hell, because without the bad news there is no good news. The fear of separation from God in hell for eternity is a terrifying reality! But God uses that drive people towards his kindness in Christ Jesus.

If you are not a Christian this morning, you need to hear the unpopular message that you are a sinner separated from God and if you don't repent you will be thrown into hell with Satan and his followers and that means torment forever and ever. You are an enemy of God. I hope you fear this, because you can let this fear drive you to Christ. Christ can take away your sin if you trust in him. Christ can take the punishment of hell from you, and you can go from being an enemy of God to a son or daughter of God. You can go from eternal suffering in hell to eternal life in heaven with Christ.

False gospels send their preacher and their hearers to hell, but the true gospel is freedom and life in Christ.

Anything but the true Gospel is a hopeless pursuit for both the teachers and the hearers.

V. 10. The true Gospel is the hard truth.

Paul offers his life as proof that his gospel is the only life giving gospel. He calls the Galatians to take a look at his life and ask themselves the question, does his life look more like he's out for power or money or gain? Or does his life look more like he's out to glorify God by preaching *his* (meaning God's) message?

There will be more on this next week as Paul gets into an autobiography of sorts, but he asks the question of whether or not it looks more like he's aiming to please men or God.

Some scholars think that there may be an accusation against Paul here that since he's advocating for *not* getting circumcised. Obviously not getting circumcised is the thing most people probably want to hear, and so the accusation could be that Paul just want the Galatians to like him so he's letting them get off easy with this thing that proves a person's fealty to God.

Perhaps that's the case, but I think Paul recognizes that it's so much easier to tell people what they want rather than tell people what they need. His life proves that living out the gospel is not an easy life, but it's the truth that gains life.

Paul forfeits being liked, for being faithful. The gospel is not a message that everyone will respond well to, but it's the hard truth.

Remember when Jesus said that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword? He said that mother would be against daughter, and son against father. He said that if anyone loves a person more than they love Jesus, he or she is not worthy of Christ. What is Jesus talking about? He says those things in the context of accepting him by accepting his message. His message be received with joy by some, but rejected in anger by others.

You cannot please both God and man.

[I have some simple advice for anyone who has, or plans to have multiple kids. When you buy plastic plates and spoons and cups etc. buy all the same color. Because do you know what happens when you have one yellow spoon, but all three kids want a yellow spoon? You instantly become the best dad in the world to one of those kids, and the worst dad in the world to the other two.]

Who wants to be told that they stand under God's wrath unless they acknowledge him as Lord of their life and their need for repentance and Christ's forgiveness? That goes against our sinful nature that desires to be the lord of our own lives. And yet, that's the gospel.

Paul's finishing point in this verse is that if he were still out to please man (which he was), then he would not be a servant of Christ. The person who wants to glorify and serve God above all else cannot at the same time try and please people. This is true for every Christian, but it should also put some fear into the hearts of church leaders. If I ever preach another gospel, not that there is another one, you need to have me out that day.

We must not be swayed by being liked. I like being liked, but I'd rather be despised for the sake of Christ and his gospel. May that always be the case for myself and the church leaders here and all Christians in the church.

Anything but the true Gospel is a hopeless pursuit for both the teachers and the hearers.

The gospel is the cold hard truth, but it is the only truth that gives freedom, and the hope of eternal life.