

Guarding Against a “Different Gospel”

Galatians 1:6-9

I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; 7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you, and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 9 But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.

This passage has recently piqued my interest, if for no other reason than it speaks of something that should cause a breach in what we term “Christian fellowship.” It seems clear that Paul is stating that, should *anyone* (even angels, even himself) try to teach something different than what the apostles first brought to these Christians at Galatia, they are to be “accursed” (literally, “excommunicated,” “banned,” or “cursed”). In other words, if a brother or a sister in Christ – even a dearly loved and respected one – starts to teach something contrary to the pure gospel of Christ, avoid them and have nothing to do with them. What does that really mean?

I think it means that it isn’t enough to simply hold fast to another Christian just because you’re both thankful that Christ died for you. If that were the case, then Paul would not have gone on in his letter *to the Christians* at Galatia about what exactly this “other gospel” was that was being taught (as this “other” gospel was being taught by fellow Christians), and Paul wouldn’t have made the charge to let them be “accursed.” If all it took to band arms together was a common belief in the fact that Jesus died to free us from our bondage to sin and give us everlasting life, then Paul wouldn’t have had to write Galatians; he would have let the matter go and instead encourage everyone to focus on Jesus’ death. Well, he didn’t; in fact, this “other” teaching was finding such acceptance that Paul goes so far as to call it “leaven,” and “not from Him who calls you” (Gal. 5:6-9), and that those who teach it will “bear his [own] judgment.”

What was this “different gospel” (“which is really not another” Gal. 1:7) in Paul’s day that had him concerned? It was the false teaching that circumcision and adherence to the Mosaic Law was the means for justification amongst the saved, and was necessary in order to receive their heavenly inheritance. Now, nowhere does Paul condemn the Law – he in fact calls it “spiritual” (Rom. 7:14) – but he does make the clear case that it is faith, apart from the Law, that justifies the saved – “the righteous man shall live by faith” (Gal. 3:11). Furthermore, he sees it necessary to emphasize that the idea of being “Jewish” or “Gentile” is erased once a person is “in Christ”; the focus is not on one’s religion or genealogy or even biology, but instead it is on one’s belief in Christ and the Word of God as He presented it. Any type of man’s works of religion - referencing the outside form only - is not now, nor has it ever been, necessary for any type of justification.

The Law was a tutor that led to Christ, and now that Christ has come it is no longer necessary.

Paul's argument against the Mosaic Law and in favor of grace oftentimes gets misunderstood. Many Christians read this book and think that Paul is speaking against all works in general and then juxtaposing that with grace. Many Christians of the "free grace theology" derive their teaching from this book. But that's not what Paul is teaching. He's teaching that the outward form of "keeping the Law" does not sanctify anyone, just as Jesus told the Pharisees that their holding of man's tradition at the expense of real inward Spirit-driven change made them hypocrites. From the Old Testament one can see that it is this very thing taught from the outset – which David understood – which is "For Thou dost not delight in sacrifice, otherwise I would give it; Thou art not pleased with burnt offering. 17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise" (Psalm 51:16-17). It is and always has been a heart issue with God, and His desire is for all of His children to believe in Him according to His Word with all our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength.

But like I said, the condemnation of *fleshly* works does not negate the necessity of works of faith. Clearly God demands acts of faith from His people, and He does nothing short of shout it out that we are to BELIEVE and then ACT ON THAT BELIEF... why else would He tell us how to live as Christians?... how and why it is necessary to lose our soul now in order to pick it up in the age to come? Why would He *beg us* to "abstain from all fleshly lusts that wage war against the soul"? Why would He warn us to "do good" or else suffer loss? Works matter, of course, but they must be born out of faith. The problem comes when people think that "works" are lists of do-good items; works are not specific items to check off of a list (that would be religion), but are Spirit-driven and Spirit-inspired responses to God's will and calling on our life.

But back to my point. Paul's main contention is that Christians were teaching other Christians a "different gospel," and because of this many were "hindered from obeying the truth" (Gal. 5:7). This slight deviation from the original gospel that they heard from the apostles was causing much harm, so much so that Paul finds it necessary to warn those who still knew the truth to treat those "disturbers" as accursed. How does this apply to us today, now that we know that leaven has indeed permeated through almost all of what Christians call "the gospel"? The real challenge is for each of us to go back to the Scriptures – *all of them, Old Testament and New Testament alike* – and find the "true gospel" that Paul preached. Easier said than done, but possible nonetheless. Hold fast and true to it. Don't deviate from it, no matter what and no matter who tries to teach you otherwise. Don't band arms with someone just because you both believe Christ died for you; Paul didn't and he gives us an example which to follow. But at the same time, don't discount every other Christian who holds a different view than you. Who is to say your view isn't leavened?

This passage piqued my interest mainly because I believe it negates the all-too-common statement of rallying Christians together solely based on their common salvation, without realizing the dangers and pitfalls that can be had when one encounters and is influenced by a “different gospel.” Be aware, be diligent, and “contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 1:3).

I Corinthians 10:1

For I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2 and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea; 3 and all ate the same spiritual food; 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they were drinking from a spiritual rock which followed them; and the rock was Christ. 5 Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness.

6 Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved. 7 And do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." 8 Nor let us act immorally, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 Nor let us try the Lord, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 Nor grumble, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction, upon whom the ends of the ages have come.

12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.