

LAW, LIBERTY, AND LIFE IN JESUS - Knowing How it all Works

Part three - Teaching #2133

Sunday, October 10th, 2021 - 10 a.m.

Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

WHEN ANGELS DON'T BRING GOOD TIDINGS OF GREAT JOY

Galatians 1:6-10 - “I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — [7] not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. [8] But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! [9] As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him! [10] For am I now trying to persuade people, or God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”

These verses reveal the fact that something is going on in this letter to the Galatians. We know there is something different about this letter because this is the only letter from Paul that doesn't open with either *prayer* or *praise and thanksgiving*. It's almost as though Paul senses there is no time to waste in confronting the false teaching that is spreading in these churches in Galatia. There is simply no time for pleasantries.

Something else: There is a message in these verses for the contemporary church. This is not just a dusty record of some ancient controversy over theological doctrine in the early church. We are where Paul was in terms of the thinking of the day. I hope you will see how urgently these verses are needed in our minds and in our pulpits, in our Christian Education classes, in our Bible studies, and in our homes.

1) **THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE IN THESE VERSES IS THERE IS ONLY ONE GOSPEL**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:6-7 - “I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel — [7] *not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*”

You can see how verse 7 is really given to correct what could be taken as a wrong interpretation of his words in verse 6. In verse 6 Paul expresses his amazement that these Christians are so quickly turning from Christ to a “***different gospel.***” But that might leave the impression that there really ***is*** another gospel - that there actually ***are*** options. This is why Paul immediately adds in verse 7, “***which is not another....***”

There are no other gospels to turn to. There are other **religions**.
There are other **sacred books**. There are other **inspiring leaders**.
But there is no other **gospel**.

I hope you can see what Paul is doing here. I hope you can understand why this is making him so unpopular. He is standing flat-footed against the notion of **religious pluralism or a blending of religious ideas in some kind of soupy syncretism**. People may **think** that they can modify the gospel. They may **think** they are turning to a new and different message. But they can't be **saved** by those messages. Paul stands flatly opposed to the notion that we are all finding our own way to God through the sincerity of our own high ideals and loving deeds.

Then Paul takes it a step farther. He refuses to allow for the possibility of any other revelation of hope and salvation outside of Jesus Christ. This is where he addresses the possibility of the appearance of angelic beings, anointed messengers, even he himself, if he should change his mind and make a different declaration from the gospel he proclaimed to them:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:8-9 - “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! [9] As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!”

This is Paul’s measuring stick for divine truth. The world’s religious stage is littered with messages from angelic beings. Almost all religions claim some input from the supernatural realm. And many of these religions still contradict each other! Paul removes the gospel from the reach of additional revelations from angels or prophets. The passing of time and the changing of attitudes and world-views only changes our fickle *opinions* of the gospel, not its content or trustworthiness.

The trustworthiness of the gospel is a crucially important factor for Christians. This is why the key events ungirding our faith are not only *supernaturally revealed*, but *witnessed by people*. Whether it’s the birth of Jesus (remember how God literally calls shepherds with angels and moves stars to guide wise men to *observe* the events of Christ’s coming into this world?), or the death of Jesus (crucified in the city of Jerusalem when literally people of the whole world are gathered there for Pass Over celebrations), or the resurrection of Jesus (remember that Paul says the risen Christ was *seen* by over 500 people?).

2) **BECAUSE OF THE INTERNAL NATURE OF THE FALSE TEACHING, THE CHURCH MUST CARE AS DEEPLY ABOUT THE CONTENT OF THE GOSPEL AS IT CARES ABOUT THE EFFECT OF THE GOSPEL**

There is a particular *kind* of false teaching that Paul was addressing. This wasn't a competing religious system along the lines of Islam or Hinduism. In other words, this was not a competing religion that arose from *outside* the church. These false teachers were professing Christians from *inside* the church:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:7 - "...not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are troubling you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."

Notice what else Paul says about these "*disturbers*" of the faith:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 2:12 - "For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party."

So, these false teachers knew the leadership of the local churches, including the apostle James, and claimed to be coming from him. This means that these weren't foreigners or outsiders to the Christian faith. These false teachers knew the ropes. They knew what words to use. They knew what names to drop. They worked from the inside out.

This seemed to be quite a common occurrence. It receives frequent and repeated **warnings** in the New Testament that are all but missing in today's casual, contemporary church. Listen to Paul's last words to the church he planted at Ephesus:

IPAD TEXT - Acts 20:25-31 - “[25] “And now I know that none of you, among whom I went about preaching the kingdom, will ever see me again. [26] Therefore I declare to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all of you, [27] because I did not avoid declaring to you the whole plan of God. [28] Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased with his own blood. [29] I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. [30] Men will rise up even from your own number and distort the truth to lure the disciples into following them. [31] Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for three years I never stopped warning each one of you with tears.”

We need to think deeply about this. Because surely the implication is that if false teaching can arise and do such damage *inside* the church, then we are obligated to foster understanding and discernment *inside* the church. The church must be sharpest where the danger is greatest. And the contemporary church is replete with examples pointing to the fact that most of the damaging teachings threatening the gospel of Jesus Christ arise *inside* the church as Christians set their attention on something they deem more spiritual and more practical than doctrinal instruction.

Paul summons the church to clear doctrinal thinking on other occasions as well:

IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 14:20 - “Brothers and sisters, don’t be childish in your thinking, but be infants in regard to evil and adult in your thinking.”

Mature thinking is never easy to do. And the dull tone of our entertainment driven world makes it harder and harder to accomplish in the church. The church itself has taken a noticeable and dramatic shift away from doctrinal teaching in the last decade. People do not have much patience for doctrine these days. Almost everyone wants something more *spiritual* and *mystical*, more *therapeutic* (*practical* is the word we usually use) than just doctrine.

But if internal deception and desertion is a real possibility then doctrinal study and maturity isn't a *luxury* for us at Cedarview. It is an absolute *necessity*.

Listen to John Piper's insightful words on this subject:

***“There is a tragic pattern in churches and in history, I think. Renewal breaks forth on a church or on an age through a fresh encounter with the gospel and the Spirit. Hearts are filled with the love of Christ and mouths are filled with praise, the concern for evangelism and justice rises. But in all the glorious stirrings of heart there begins to be an impatience with doctrinal refinements. Clear doctrine requires thought, and thought is seen to be the enemy of feeling, so it is resisted. There is the widespread sense that the Holy Spirit will guard the church from all error and so rigorous study and thought about the gospel are felt to be not only a threat to joy but a failure of faith. The result over a generation is the emergence of a people whose understanding of Biblical teaching is so hazy and imprecise that they are sitting ducks for the Galatian's heresy.*”**

- 3) **WHENEVER SOUND DOCTRINE IS REJECTED, GOD HIMSELF IS REJECTED**

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:6 - “I am amazed that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel....”

Please notice carefully what Paul says here. In a strange selection of words he describes what these people are rejecting when they turn from the sound doctrine of the gospel. He doesn't say they're deserting “*it*” (the gospel). He says they're deserting “*Him*” (God). In other words, when we fail to pursue and embrace sound doctrine, it's not an *impersonal, intellectual* rejection. It's a *personal, relational* rejection. When sound doctrine is rejected, God is rejected.

How we need to hear this today! There is such a widespread, mistaken notion in the church that if we just worship and flow in the river of the Spirit we don't have to worry about doctrine and teaching and study. This is an utterly unscriptural notion. It is straight from the Devil. It's the kind of thinking *fallen angels* propagate.

4) **IF THE GOSPEL IS A WONDERFUL THING TO RECEIVE, IT IS A HORRIBLE THING TO REJECT**

Again, Paul puts this in much stronger terms than our cotton-candy thinking is comfortable with:

IPAD TEXT- Galatians 1:8-9 - “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him! [9] As we have said before, I now say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, a curse be on him!”

Twice Paul uses that word *anathema* - “*accursed.*” In this passage he uses it particularly to describe the fate of those who *distort the truth and proclaim* a religion that sounds Christian but doesn’t magnify the gospel. Paul would not for one minute buy into our “*to each his own*” attitude. He had absolutely no tolerance for false doctrine. Paul stood up and screamed at false doctrine. And he said all who deserted or distorted the gospel for another form of teaching were under God’s curse.

But Paul didn’t *just* use that term “*accursed*” for false teachers. He said that *all* who rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ were equally accursed:

IPAD TEXT - 1 Corinthians 16:22 - “If anyone does not love the Lord, a curse be on him. Our Lord, come!”

That word **“accursed”** is the very same word - **“anathema.”** People - all people - are accursed without the gospel. Do we hear that word **“anathema”** the way we should hear it? We should hear that word the way a child hears his very first thunderstorm, or a homeowner experiences his very first earthquake. That’s the passion that caused Paul to rage against false doctrine. When we don’t rage the same way it betrays a lack of devotion to the truth. And, as we’ve already seen, a lack of devotion to the truth is a lack of devotion to God Himself.

“Accursed!” There is no other fate possible for those who do not **“love the Lord.”** This is because, as Paul pointed out, there are no other gospels - no other chances of redemption and forgiveness.

We need to grasp these verses today. It is a **loveless** thing to allow people to adopt a **“whatever works for you”** approach to religion. It is a loveless and cruel thing to treat all religious messages with equal weight. It is a loveless and cruel thing to allow your kids to **“make up their own minds about Jesus Christ.”**

It’s loveless because the **glory of God** is at stake and the **salvation of their souls** is at stake. With that in mind we come to understand Paul’s heart a bit better when he expresses his amazement - his shock - that people would turn away from the truth of God’s Word about Jesus Christ:

IPAD TEXT - Galatians 1:6 - “I am *amazed* that you are so quickly turning away from him who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel....”

That’s the message of these verses in a nutshell. Christians should scream when sound doctrine is belittled. Tolerance to Biblical ignorance is fatal. And loving people won’t allow it to go unchallenged.