

# TURNING TO A DIFFERENT GOSPEL

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*Galatians 1:6-10*

## Introduction:

Last Sunday evening the MTV Awards were shown on television. (Let me say at the outset that I did not watch the show, and had no interest in the show.) During the show one of the celebrities to perform was Miley Cyrus, who was very popular a few years ago because of her association with the Disney Corporation as Hannah Montana. She was promoted as a role model to young girls. Well in her performance last Sunday she was anything but a role model. I am not going to describe her actions, but let me just say that it was a graphic vulgar display of sexuality, totally unacceptable for television (or anywhere else for that matter.) One cannot help but wonder how, in a matter of a few short years, she could have moved from where she was as Hannah Montana to what she is today.

That is the same kind of question that is bothering the Apostle Paul about these churches in Galatia. Something has happened in just a few short months to lead these people astray. Last week we saw the message Paul had for them and for us—a message of grace and glory. Grace to you and glory to God—and all because of Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age. That is the gospel in a nutshell, and that is all in Paul's introduction to this letter and his greeting to the believers in these churches in Galatia.

But there is a problem, and Paul takes no time getting to the heart of the matter. He quickly moves to the reason he wrote this letter. And that is the defection of these new believers from the truth into error.

Verses 6-10 address the issue with some rather strong statements. We are going to be spending our time on this brief passage this morning. I would like to refer again to John Piper, as he summarizes these verses very succinctly:

"The truth that underlies this passage is that there is only one gospel. Growing up out of this truth are three statements which are very crucial for us to hear and believe, because nothing has happened to change them between Paul's day and ours.

The first is that it is astonishing when a person hears and believes the gospel but afterward turns away from it (1:6–7). The second is that if a person rejects the gospel, he stands under God's curse, whether he is an angel or an apostle (1:8, 9). The third statement is that the servant of the gospel seeks to please God alone, not men. (1:10)"

I want to use his outline of this passage as a guide for our thoughts this morning. We begin with the fundamental truth that...

## There is Only One Gospel

The pivotal nature of the true gospel is what is at stake here. The passage we have before us does not define the gospel but is focused on the centrality of that gospel. We will see the content of the gospel defined and expounded throughout the rest of this letter, but for now the emphasis is on the fact that there is only one gospel, one truth.

v. 6 – the issue is that Paul has received word that these congregations, which had been established by Paul and were dear to his heart, are abandoning that gospel and turning to another gospel—a "different gospel". The KJV says "another gospel." What does Paul mean by that? Is there a multitude of gospels out there from which we are to choose the one we like the best?

No, Paul is quick to point out, "...not that there is another one..." I want to make sure that you understand what Paul is saying here. In the old KJV it says, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another..." That sounds like a contradiction. But the truth is, that is just a rather confusing translation of the original.

You see, in the original Greek there are two very different words. First, Paul says, you are turning to another gospel—the Greek word is heteron, from which we get heteros. You know what that means? A different kind. Heterogeneous. Homogenous means the same kind. Heterogeneous means a different kind. So he says, "You are removed unto heteros, a different gospel."

Then he goes on to say, "which is not another..." Here the word used is "allos," which means the same kind—another of the same kind. So what he is really saying is that they are turning to a different gospel

which is not the same thing as the gospel they first believed. "You have been removed unto another gospel of a different kind, which isn't the exact gospel." It would be better to translate it "unto another gospel which is not the same gospel."

That is why the translators of the NIV said, "...which is no gospel at all..." You see, it's not the same gospel. It's a different gospel. The ESV translators put it, "...[you] are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one..."

There are a number of important implications of this text for us today. Piper points out a very important implication in these words:

"The text is a radical and forthright denial of a pluralism which says that we are all on different roads to heaven, but our destination is the same. There are popular forms of this universalism, and there are technical, scholarly forms of it, but there is no biblical universalism—that is, no biblical teaching that a person can go on rejecting the gospel of Christ and still be saved. There are other religions besides Christianity, and there are other leaders besides Jesus Christ, but there is no other gospel, no other good news of salvation."

I need to point out that this quote came from a sermon preached by John Piper in 1973. If this was an issue 40 years ago, how much more do we see it in our world today with the drive to melt all of the world religions together into one great system that is supposed to be palatable to all people of all religious beliefs? But the truth is, there is only one gospel.

It is also important to note that this threat was not coming from some kind of foreign religious system. It came from within the church of Paul's day. There were those who claimed to be of the faith, who were distorting and perverting the gospel of Christ and were stirring up trouble. The NIV says, "...throwing you into confusion..." The word used there means to stir up by shaking back and forth, to agitate. That is what these false teachers were doing. They were agitating, stirring things up and causing confusion. But the real issue is that it was an in-house distortion. It was promoted by men who called themselves Christian "brothers" (2:4).

Because of this danger it becomes critical that we are clear when it comes to our theology. Doctrinal maturity is of utmost importance.

There is a great tendency today to minimize the importance of doctrine and theology. The result is a hazy understanding, at best, of what the Bible really says about salvation and all that is related to it. The further result of that is a willingness to accept whatever comes along from anyone who claims to speak for God and truth. That is why there is so little understanding of Biblical truth and doctrine in the church today.

So the gist of this passage of Scripture, as Paul wrote to the churches of Galatia, is that there is only one gospel. And the implications of that are that there is only one way of salvation—only one road to heaven, no many—and that thorough attention to doctrine and biblical understanding is crucial in the life of the church.

Well, there are still the three statements I mentioned earlier which grow out of that foundational truth that there is no other gospel. We need to look briefly at them this morning.

## Turning Away from the Gospel is Astonishing

Paul is incredulous that the Galatians have been led astray. I want to try to define a few words here. That word "astonished" in the original is really the idea of being amazed. The NKJV uses the term "marvel." It actually has the idea of being in awe, or admiration.

"quickly" - This Greek word can mean either "easily" or "quickly" and sometimes both. Quite possibly both senses characterized the Galatians' response to the false teachers' heretical doctrines.

"deserting" or "turning away" - The Greek word was used of military desertion, which was punishable by death.

That is literally the word to defect. It is translated in old lexicons to transfer one's allegiance. It's a defection. It's a deserter. It's the word used for a turncoat. Paul says, "I can't believe it. You're already spiritual deserters. You're turncoats." – MacArthur

And Paul is astonished that this is happening so easily and so quickly. And in this verse there are a couple of reasons implied why this is so astonishing.

First, it is a turning away from a calling God. "You are deserting him who called you." They are not just turning from a doctrine, or an idea.

You need to understand that a concern for doctrine is not impersonal. The gospel is the *very personal* good news of God's call to you. If you turn to a different gospel, you turn away from God, and that is astonishing.

The second reason turning to a different gospel is astonishing is that it is a turning away from grace. Read v. 6 again. In Galatians 5:4 Paul describes what is happening like this: "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace." Paul is simply stunned that so soon after his beautiful portrayal of Christ crucified for their sin they would begin to turn to another gospel. He says in 3:1, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?"

You can picture Paul back in Antioch listening in stunned silence to the reports that the churches of Galatia are turning away from God and away from the grace of Christ. And he puts his head in his hands and wonders if his work was in vain. It was astonishing then, and it is astonishing today that anyone hearing the best news in all the world (God offers you full and free forgiveness and hope) would turn to a different gospel, which is *no gospel at all*. – (Piper)

## Turning Away from the Gospel Brings God's Curse

Read vv. 8-9 – the word that is repeated here, "accursed" in the NIV is "eternally condemned." The word in the original is "anathema." It is defined as a thing devoted to God without hope of being redeemed, and if an animal, to be slain; therefore a person or thing doomed to destruction.

In the OT God often commanded his people, when they went out to conquer a pagan city, that everything in the city was to be devoted to destruction. In Joshua 6 as the Lord gave instruction regarding the destruction of Jericho, he said (v. 17), "And the city and all that is within it shall be devoted to the Lord for destruction." They went against Jericho with that command before them.

But in Josh. 7:1 we read, "But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, for Achan the son of Carmi, son of Zabdi, son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things." And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel."

Everything was to be devoted to destruction. That is the idea here in Galatians. Anyone bearing a message different from the true gospel of Jesus Christ, whether man or angel, is anathema—in other words, set apart, devoted to destruction.

To turn away from the gospel and the truth of the gospel is to place ourselves under the eternal condemnation of a holy God. That thought ought to shake us to our very roots. It is not enough look with a self-righteous attitude or cluck our sanctimonious tongues at those who blatantly distort the gospel and say, "Be gone with you." We need to carefully consider to what extent we are corrupting the gospel in our own lives. That word "anathema" and the implication of it should shake us to the core.

## Seeking to Please God, Not Men

Finally, the third statement that grows out of the underlying truth of only one gospel is that the servant of the gospel seeks to please God alone and not men. Read v. 10.

Paul was willing to say the harsh things he said in vv. 8-9, because his priority was on pleasing God rather than people. If the truth offended people, so be it. These things had to be said for the sake of the gospel of Christ. One more quote from John Piper:

Two things are at stake when the gospel is perverted: one is the glory of Christ; the other is the salvation of sinners. If the gospel is twisted, the all-sufficiency of Christ's work is dishonored, and the way to salvation for sinners is blocked. Therefore, in order to serve Christ—to advance his glory and achieve his saving purpose—Paul must oppose the perversion of the gospel with all his might, whether it pleases people or not. For the glory of Christ (6:14) and for the good of those who may yet believe the gospel (2:5), Paul is willing to speak unpleasant truth.

It is a most freeing truth when we realize that there is only one person we need to please in this life, and that is Jesus Christ. Certainly that does not mean that our aim is to displease people, but ultimately it is only the Lord's approval that matters in any choice or decision we must make. Our choices will sometimes please others and sometimes not. But our goal must always be to please God and seek his approval. That is to be our single-minded ambition in life.

## Conclusion:

So, the underlying truth of this passage is that there is one, and only one, gospel. It is therefore astonishing to turn away from it—away from *God* who calls, and away from *grace* in Christ. It is not only astonishing, it is tragic, because the person who rejects the gospel is anathema, accursed and cut off from God. But on the other hand, if you embrace the one true gospel, not only are all your sins forgiven by God, but a thrilling liberty and freedom come into your life because there is only one person to please, Jesus Christ, and he only wills what is best for you.

Move into communion, focussing on the one true gospel—the message of salvation and forgiveness because of Jesus' sacrifice for us.