

No Other Gospel

I suppose you can say this of every sermon I preach, but today, it needs to be emphasized: This is a very serious sermon I am sharing with you today. In fact, it could be said that this is the most serious sermon I will ever preach on any given Sunday. Here's why:

Pretend that you have in your possession an original Rembrandt or Picasso painting. And let's say, for whatever reason, you decide to add a few brush strokes of your own to that original Rembrandt or Picasso painting. What did you just do to that painting? Did you improve it? Did you add to its value? No, you ruined it. You defaced it. You turned it into something it is not.

Well, that's what happens when you or I or anyone adds our own brush strokes to the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is proclaimed to us in God's holy Word. The gospel is the greatest masterpiece of the world. You can't improve upon "by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone, in Christ alone." You can't add to the completeness of "it is finished" from the cross. You can't give more life to "Christ is risen" from the empty tomb. And to add any brush stroke of our own to the original canvass of the gospel's good news is to ruin it, to deface it, to turn it into something it is not.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, we must understand: For any assurance of forgiveness, for any certainty of salvation, for any freedom from condemnation, for any promise of eternal life in heaven, we must keep the gospel of God's Word the gospel without adding to it in any way! We must, because there is no other gospel.

Listen to Galatians 1:1-10:

Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead –² and all the brothers and sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia: ³Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

⁶I 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 – ⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

¹⁰Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

This is the context of Galatians 1:1-10: In Acts chapter 13 and 14 the apostle Paul had been sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ in the region of Galatia, and many people came to faith in Christ. But it says in Acts 15:1: **“Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’”** In other words, these “certain people” were adding the brush stroke of circumcision to the gospel. They were saying that besides believing in Jesus as your Savior, you must also do this one thing in order to be saved. They were saying that you must embrace Christ and the Law to be saved. They were saying that faith in Jesus is necessary, but it’s not sufficient. They were saying that you must finish what Christ began. That’s what’s behind Paul’s passionate letter to the Galatians. That’s the reason for such serious, strong language in Galatians 1:1-10. Yes, as serious as being aghast that they would even entertain the thought of adding to the gospel, and as serious as declaring to anyone who does add to the gospel: **“Let them be under God’s curse!”**

Why does Paul speak so forcefully? For two reasons: Because to drift from the gospel is to abandon God, and to distort the gospel is to oppose God.

Look again at Galatians 1:6-7: **⁶I 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 – ⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.**

To turn to a different gospel, by adding to “by grace alone in Christ alone,” is equivalent to leaving the true God and turning to a false god or idol. The word “desert” in the Greek literally means to transfer your allegiance to another. This is exactly what is at the heart of any and all self-righteousness. It is abandoning God’s grace and turning to our own deeds for salvation. It is thinking or believing that we (some way, somehow) can gain or obtain or earn or merit God’s acceptance and forgiveness. Which, by the way, we cannot. **“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God’s sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin”** (Romans 3:20).

And be forewarned: This desertion doesn’t happen overnight. It involves a drifting. When we become pre-occupied with life’s demands, concerns, and responsibilities, we all have the tendency to self-exalt or self-justify. We all have the tendency to think that faith in Jesus is important, but it is not sufficient. We all have the tendency to think God’s grace depends on our goodness. We all have the tendency to think that we can contribute to our worthiness before God. All of these tendencies are like the undertow of the ocean, where, without us even realizing it, we drift further and further away from the cross of Christ, only to find ourselves all alone, left to drown in our own self-righteousness.

The consequences of adding to the gospel of Jesus Christ couldn’t be more serious. Note that Paul said not once but twice, **“If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!”** Literally, let them be irrevocably destroyed. Why such damning language? Because to distort the gospel is to go against God.

When we or anyone thinks that they can contribute to their salvation, the essence of what Christ did is at stake. Can you imagine standing before Jesus – the crucified and risen One – saying, *“What you did is not enough for me. Your perfect life is not enough; your sacrifice on the cross for my sins is not enough”*? Yet that’s exactly what we are saying when we think or act like we can or must contribute to our salvation. Nothing opposes God more than that. To distort the gospel with self-righteousness is to cut people off from the salvation God is offering, is to cut people off from grace, is to cut people off from God himself.

So that you can fully understand the seriousness of what is being said, take to heart this statement: **“To get the gospel wrong is to get God wrong.”** Can you imagine anything more tragic or serious? Can you imagine anything more damning?

This is why we must protect the gospel. To protect the gospel is to honor God. Listen to verse 10 again: **“Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.”**

Apparently, the same “certain people,” in Acts 15, who were insisting that you must be circumcised to be saved, were also accusing Paul of trying to enhance his reputation and popularity by abolishing or diminishing the law. But they couldn’t be more wrong about Paul. Listen to what he says in 1 Timothy 1, and notice how these words also include you: **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. But for that reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen”** (1 Timothy 1:15-17).

Dear friends, we can honor God in many different ways. But nothing honors God more than to rest in God’s grace, than to trust in his faithfulness, than to stand firmly on his powerful Word, than to put our faith in Jesus as our one and only Savior. Nothing honors God more than to hold sacred the “alone” in by grace alone, by faith alone, by Scripture alone, in Christ alone. Why? Because there is no other gospel that saves. Amen.