

NO OTHER GOSPEL!

Galatians 1:1-24

Key Verses: 1:6-7

“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

The book of Galatians is about freedom. St. Paul reminds us that we have been set free from sin and legalism by our Lord Jesus Christ. We learn from this book what true freedom is and how we should use the freedom in Christ.

In Chapter 1, starting from his greeting, Paul reminds the believers in Galatia (and us) of the true gospel of Jesus Christ. He teaches us what the essence of the gospel is and that there is no other gospel (1-10). He also tells us how he personally received the gospel (11-24).

We live in a society where everything is relative. This is especially true to many young people of our time. To them, even the gospel of salvation is relative. Many assume that they will go to heaven if they are “good.” Some are attracted to New Age mysticism and eastern religions. May God help us to think about the essence of the gospel so that we may be very clear what we believe in our hearts and share it with young people!

I. AN APOSTLE SENT BY GOD (1-2)

Paul was not one of the original twelve apostles. In fact, by the time the new Christian church was born in Jerusalem through Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, the young rabbi Saul (as he was known then) was breathing out murderous threats to the disciples of Jesus (Ac 9:1). He did not become a Christian until he was changed on his way to Damascus to arrest more Christians there. But in verse 1, Paul introduces himself as an apostle. Why? An apostle is “one who is sent out for a mission.” This term is traditionally reserved for the original twelve apostles of Jesus. There were many disciples of Jesus—the “learners” who followed Jesus. Out of them, Jesus appointed the twelve—designating them apostles—to be with him and to send them out to preach (Mk 3:14). Still, Paul identified himself as an apostle. It was because he believed that the Lord chose him to be his instrument to carry his name before the Gentiles (Ac 9:15). He met the Risen Christ personally. The Lord set him apart to be his messenger. He was sent out for a mission by the Lord Jesus. Paul had no doubt in his mind that he was an apostle. Look at verses 1-2. *Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia.* Paul said that he was an apostle, sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. An American ambassador to a foreign country represents our nation. He or she has the power and authority bestowed on him or her by the U.S. president. In the same way,

Paul had personal conviction that he was sent by Jesus Christ and God who raised him from the dead to share the gospel with the Gentiles.

Likewise, we are also ambassadors of Christ (2Co 6:20). We call ourselves a missionary, a shepherd and a Bible teacher. We have been sent by God to share the gospel with young people of our time. As such, we have a mandate from God to study the word of God with them and help them to grow as disciples of Jesus. We pray and struggle to share the gospel of Jesus with young people, not because a fellowship leader tells us to, but because Jesus commands us to. Jesus said, “Do you truly love me? ... Feed my lambs” (Jn 21:15). Do you have personal conviction that you have been sent by God with this mission? If not, I urge you to have a quiet time with the Lord to make sure why we struggle to do what we do. May God inspire you and convict your heart with a specific Scripture verse! God helped Dr. John to accept this mission through Mark 1:17, which says, “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.” So he spends time to study the word of God with young people and pray for them. God moved M. Deborah’s heart through Romans 1:5: “Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”

One reason why Paul wanted to identify himself clearly at the beginning of this letter was that some false teachers were trying to undermine his preaching by saying that he was not one of the original twelve apostles. So Paul emphasized that his apostleship came not from man, but from Jesus Christ. The authority and credibility of his preaching came from God. There was another reason why the believers in Galatia should have listened to Paul. He was their Bible teacher and shepherd. He and Barnabas pioneered the churches in southern Galatia (Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) during their first missionary journey (Ac 13:4,13,42-50; 14:1-21). Afterwards, Paul visited them several more times to strengthen their faith. But now, Paul was deeply concerned for them as he heard that they were thrown into confusion by some false teachers who tried to undo the work of God.

II. THERE IS NO OTHER GOSPEL! (3-10)

Look at verses 3-5. *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.* This greeting by Paul is somewhat unusual in that he does not praise the faith of the saints or offer prayers for them first, as he usually does in other epistles. Instead, he cannot wait to talk about the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It was because Paul had a sense of urgency for the believers in Galatia. Something very dangerous was happening among them. It concerned their spiritual life and the future of God’s ministry there.

What was the urgent matter that Paul wanted to address to his beloved Christians in Galatia? Look at verses 6-7. *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are*

trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. What alarmed St. Paul was that the believers in the Galatian churches were deserting God who had called them by the grace of Christ and were turning to a different gospel—which was no gospel at all. Some people were throwing them into confusion with a pseudo-gospel. They were trying to pervert the gospel of Christ by poisoning the minds of the believers with false teachings. Paul had risked his own life to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to them. God used his prayers, labor and tears to build the churches. Now some people were trying to snatch God’s sheep away from God. It takes so much effort and time to build a ministry but it takes only one person to poison the minds of a whole congregation.

As a shepherd who loved them very much, Paul could not sit around and watch the false teachers destroy the ministry by perverting the gospel of Jesus Christ. Look at verses 8-9. *But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!* Paul had preached only the pure and true gospel to them. Now, the false teachers were trying to taint the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul warned them sternly, using a harsh language. He said twice, “let him be eternally condemned!” Paul’s motive in saying this was not to gain anything for himself, but to help the believers to remain in the true gospel. He says in verse 10: *Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*

At this point, you may ask, “What was the true, unadulterated gospel that Paul preached and what was the “different gospel” that the Galatian Christians were turning to? I am glad you asked the question.

As you know, gospel means “good news.” When we heard the news about Osama bin Laden’s death last week, many of us said, “Good riddance!” It was good news to us because we were concerned about what he would do next with his evil plots. We also have good news that three of our members have completed their new academic degree programs this spring—Dr. Mary with a Ph.D., Josh with a Masters degree, and M. Isaac with an Associate degree. You may have other news that is good, such as a new job, a good report card, and a new grandchild. However, the real good news is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Why? Suppose you were a death-row inmate waiting for your day of execution. What would be the best good news you could possibly hear? Of course, it would be the news of a clemency by governor or president. And this is what happened to us.

You see, all of us were condemned to death in hell in eternity. It was because of our sins that we committed before God. Everyone sinned. Not even one person is without sin. We sinned knowingly and unknowingly. And sin cuts us off from our Creator God, the source of our lives. No one could help us from our condemnation--not our parents, teachers, friends, our shrink or financial advisor. But God loved us so much that he sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us. When Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the

Lord” (Lk 2:10-11). Jesus, the Son of God, came to this world to save us from our sin and death. He came to pay the price of our sins with his own life. He died on the cross to wash away our sin-stained blood with his own precious blood. So when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, he declared, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29) Jesus died for our sins and God raised him from the dead to prove that we have indeed been saved from our sin and death. This is the good news of Jesus Christ. Paul summarizes this gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ...”

The essence of the gospel is that Jesus gave himself to save us from our sins (4a) and God raised him from the dead (1a). We are saved from our sin and death when we come to Jesus and accept his cross and resurrection, not just theoretically but from our hearts and with a full commitment to Christ. There is no other way. Jesus is the only way. Anyone who believes in Jesus shall have eternal life. It is only by faith in him, not by something we do. We cannot earn our salvation, because God opened the way for our salvation by himself, only by his grace.

But the false teachers presented a different gospel to the believers in Galatia. They suggested a different way to go to heaven. They claimed that Paul made the gospel too easy. They said that having faith in Christ was not enough. They taught that a Gentile person must observe the Jewish laws and customs in order to be saved. These Judaizers said, “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved” (Ac 15:1). By adding these extra requirements for the Gentiles, they denied the power of the redemptive work that Jesus had done on the cross. This was a serious matter and the future of the gospel work among them was in jeopardy. We can understand why Paul was concerned for the Christians.

The grace of Christ is at the heart of the gospel. We are saved by faith in Christ alone. We are saved by the grace of God alone. We cannot earn our salvation. Many people today have this notion that if we are “good” we should be entitled to heaven and eternal life. But our salvation is the grace of God. It is what God does, not what we do. There is not a thing we can add to the work of salvation Jesus had done. We cannot earn our salvation by donating money to charity, working for soup kitchen, visiting prisons, or being a suicide bomber. We cannot secure our salvation either by feeding many sheep or writing many testimonies. God saved us from our original sins of pride and ingratitude. If we could contribute even 1% of our salvation through our human effort, we would become proud again, saying, “I deserve it.” We would be back to square one, that is, our sin and condemnation. No, it is only by faith in Jesus, we are saved by God’s grace, so that we cannot boast (Ro 3:27). Knowing that we are saved by God’s grace alone makes us humble before God. We want to live a life of faith to please him. We want to serve him the best way we can, knowing his love and grace.

You may ask, “But didn’t Jesus tell us to be good to others, love our neighbor, take care of the poor, feed his sheep, and go into all the world and make disciples?” Yes, he did. But it is not because doing such good things will save us. These good things

cannot wash away our sins. Only the blood of Jesus can do that. We obey Jesus' commands, knowing what he has done for us and how much he loves us. We have been saved by his grace. Now we want to live a life of faith and obedience because of his grace upon us. So we struggle to love others, remembering how Jesus loves us. We feed his sheep, remembering how he loves them.

III. "GOD CALLED ME BY HIS GRACE" (11-24)

In verses 11-24, Paul answers the question of why the believers in Galatia should listen to him instead of the Judaizers. It is Paul's personal testimony concerning how God changed him by his grace. He tells us how he accepted the true gospel of Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 11-12. *I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.* Paul did not attend a seminary school to receive the gospel of Jesus Christ. He got his Ph.D. in Judaism by studying under his advisor Gamaliel who was a prominent scholar in Jerusalem. But the gospel he received was not from any man; it was from God. It wasn't some mathematical equation or computer algorithm that helped him to formulate the gospel. The gospel he preached was not something that was made up by man. He received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

And it happened this way. Before he met Jesus personally, Paul had been a rising rabbi in Judaism. He intensely persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it (13). He was in charge of executing Stephen (Ac 8:1). He went from house to house in Jerusalem, dragging off Christians to put them in prison (Ac 8:3). He went to the high priest to obtain letters that authorized him to go to Damascus and arrest more Christians there. He was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of his age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of his ancestors (14). Then God intervened in his life. On the way to Damascus, the Risen Christ appeared to him personally. By making him blind for several days, Jesus opened his spiritual eyes. Paul repented his sin of pride and accepted Jesus as his personal Savior. And Jesus let him know that he had chosen Paul as his instrument to carry his name before the Gentiles (Ac 14:15). He testifies in verses 15-16: *"But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, ..."* Paul's life was changed forever by the grace of God. The Lord changed a proud young rabbi into a man of true faith and mission! Only God could do this. So he said, "God ... called me by his grace." He also said, "By the grace of God, I am what I am" (1Co 15:10).



After his dramatic conversion, Paul took some time off to reflect on the grace of God on his life. He went down to Arabia to have a quiet time, probably to see the connection between his personal experience and the Scriptures concerning Jesus Christ. He needed this time to look into his heart and to prepare to serve the work of God. *Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days* (18). He also met James, the half-brother of Jesus, who was a leader in the Jerusalem church. His interaction with the church leaders was not extensive. Paul's point here again is that the gospel he was preaching did not come from some insider information from any man; it was the good news of Jesus Christ from God.

Paul continues his testimony in 21-24: *Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.*

St. Paul's conversion experience was dramatic and unique. Not all of us have had that kind of experience. The change in our life for some of us has been gradual overtime with much struggle and prayer support from other believers. However, no matter how we met Jesus personally, we believe and serve the same Savior—our Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life for us on the cross and who rose from the dead to prove that we are indeed saved from our sin and death.

Today's passage reminded us that the essence of the gospel: Jesus died for our sins according to the Scriptures and he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Jesus is the only way to heaven. We are saved from sin and death only by believing in this Jesus. There is no other way. This may not sound politically correct in our society, but it is the truth. Let us not desert this true gospel in the name of tolerance or for anything else. Let us not give in to some popular but false teachings so that the truth of the gospel may remain in us.