

Galatians 1: 6-8; “Turning Away from Christ”, Sermon # 3 in the series –
“Christ Has Made Us Free”, Delivered by Pastor
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Having given the churches of Galatia a reminder of the true gospel in his short introduction, the Apostle Paul now turns quickly to the subject which he wants to address throughout the rest of this whole letter; the subject of their beginning to turn away from God’s grace in the true gospel of Jesus Christ. There were some false teachers who had come to the churches of that province in Asia Minor; teachers who were teaching a different gospel; a gospel which was a perversion of the true one. The best way to know if you have believed the true gospel is to put the other one being preached right up along side of it, and the difference will be clearly seen.

This is what we want to do at this time. We want to put the true gospel which is a straight stick, on the ground, and then put the crooked stick of this other gospel right beside it, so that we will be able to tell the difference, and not be fooled. This will also help us as we witness to our relatives and friends who are in other Christian churches, so that they will be able to tell whether their church is preaching the true gospel. So this afternoon we want to look 1st of all – At the difference between the common grace of the general call versus the grace of the effectual call. And then 2nd – I want to show you the difference between the gospel of grace and the gospel of works.

1st – I want to show you the difference between the common grace of the general call versus the special grace of the effectual call. (verse 6)

Paul says, “I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel.” These people in the Galatian churches to whom Paul was writing had been called by God the Father, called in the grace of Christ into a relationship of fellowship with the Father and the Son where all the blessings of salvation were being bestowed upon them. Turn with me over to 1 Corinthians 1, verse 2. “To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.” You can see, here, the grace of being sanctified, set apart to God’s holy purposes in salvation, was because of God’s calling. This calling of God’s resulted in the believer’s calling upon the Lord in prayer for the gift of salvation. The gift of salvation bestowed, it resulted in fellowship being created between the Father and the Son and the true believer.

Look over at verse 9. “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” The Apostle Paul, although he was going to speak very stridently against the false teachers in verse 9 could still speak to these believers who were being drawn away from the truth of the gospel as being those who possessed salvation. They were in a very dangerous position, but he could still speak to them as a father would his children; gently and mildly. He could have strongly reprovved them. But instead he only says that “he marveled”. After his having preached to them the gospel, some months before, he could only marvel that they had allowed themselves to be taken in by these deceivers who had to come to them. He knew that the Galatians had really been called in the grace of Christ.

But now Paul was very concerned that some of them were actually believing that the gospel was Christ’s work plus the works of the law. They were in danger of believing that righteousness came through the law, rather than Christ. They would be falling into legalism in their preaching of the gospel to others and in the way that they lived their Christian life. They would be setting aside the grace of God and would not be able to truly glorify God in the way that they lived their lives. The wonderful thing about true salvation in Jesus Christ is that it is God’s work and not man’s. There is a general call in the gospel which is spoken of in Matthew 20: 16 and 22: 14.

This general call is based upon common grace. That is, when a person hears the gospel message, they should believe and repent of their sins. The people who formed the churches in Galatia had received the true gospel. Paul knew that these Judaizers were troubling those who were Christians by their errors. So he tells them that they needed to remember the effectual call that they had received. It was not simply the general call which comes to all men in the preaching of the gospel; rather, it was the effectual call that came through the gospel being accompanied by the grace and the power of the Holy Spirit's working in their hearts.

Turn with me over to 2nd Timothy 1, verse 8. Here the Apostle Paul says to Timothy – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel, according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.” You can see here that the calling with which each believer is saved, is a holy calling; a call to live a holy life. Part of that holy life will be the sufferings that will come; sufferings for the gospel according to the purpose and power of God. But this calling is not based upon the law. It is not according to our own works, but it is according to God's purpose and grace which was given to them in Christ before time began.

This is confirmed for us if think about the words of Romans 8, verse 29. “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” “Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.” All this is of God's purpose. It is God's acts towards us He is doing these great and mighty spiritual acts based upon of the grace which His Son, our Lord Jesus, purchased for His elect and freely gives to them. The Father draws them to the Son, and since the Son has gone to the cross to purchase this precious grace; and it is these acts of salvation are effectually bestowed upon them by the Father's declaration, and the Spirit's working.

2nd – I want to show you the difference between the gospel of grace and the gospel of works. (verses 6 and 7)

“I marvel,” Paul says that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.” This perversion of the gospel was coming from those who have since come to be known, “Judaizers”. Judaizers were those Jews who had said that they believed in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Messiah, but they also insisted that circumcision be observed, and the keeping of the ceremonial and moral law of God was still necessary to be saved. In other words, they wanted to bring the Old Covenant observances and rituals into the New Covenant Church.

This became the New Testament Church's first real doctrinal test; the Apostles having to determine whether this Judaizing would stand. Turn over with me to Acts Chapter 15, verse 1. “And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” “Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.” “So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren.” “And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all the things that God had done with them.”

Now I want to read further in this chapter, but I want you to notice something which is a very important truth here in these verses. 1st – These men it says, “came down from Judea and taught the brethren”. And what did they teach them? They were teaching them that something

else was needed more than just faith in Christ in order to be saved; that is, these young converts also had to be circumcised. These men were adding to the true gospel something more of Judaism's requirements. Circumcision was required to be performed by the parents of all Jewish males under the Old Covenant, and it was also required of proselytes to Judaism. Adam Clarke says – "The persons who taught this doctrine appear to have been converts to Christianity; but, supposing that the Christian religion was intended to perfect the Mosaic, and not to supersede it, they insisted on the necessity of circumcision, because, by that, a man was made debtor to the whole law, to observe all its rites and ceremonies." "This question produced great disturbance in the apostolic Church; and, notwithstanding the decree mentioned in this chapter, the apostles were frequently obliged to interpose their authority in order to settle it; and we find a whole Church, that at Galatia, drawn aside from the simplicity of the Christian faith by the subtlety of Judaizing teachers among themselves, who insisted on the necessity of the converted Gentiles being circumcised."

The other thing that you need to see from what we have read so far is this; It does not appear that these Judaizers were all that interested in preaching the necessity of being converted to Christ by faith in what He had done in His finished work. They were not content with preaching Christ's righteous life and sacrificial death as the basis of all of men's salvation; they were adding to the gospel something which God did not want to have continue beyond the time of John the Baptist. They were adding the works of the law. (However, the Law and the Prophets were only until John) Circumcision could not be required of the new Gentile converts without perverting the gospel. So there was not only a perversion of the gospel here, by additional requirements being added to it. There was also a neglect of preaching what was really needed; the preaching of the grace of God which is in Christ Jesus.

Let's continue on in our reading and we will see this more yet. Verse 6 of Acts 15 – "Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter." "And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: 'Men and Brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe.'" "So God who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith." "Now, therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?" "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Notice how the gospel was something which was defined long before this controversy arose and that Peter in sharing this, also shows us something more about salvation; that is, when a person believes in Christ they also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is by the Holy Spirit's working that the heart of the believer is purified by faith. That last phrase, "the heart being purified by faith" relates to the Spirit's work; of not only washing the soul of the believer clean from the guilt and defilement of sin's pollution at conversion, but it also encompasses the whole on-going work of the Holy Spirit who cleanses the believer of all sin when they confess their sins after their conversion to Christ, as they go about to live their Christian life.

We need to see that this is exactly what these Judaizing men who claimed that they had believed in Christ, did not understand or accept. They did not understand the truth related to God's grace. We can apply it in this way. There always have been people who since Christ's resurrection have claimed to be Christians and have insisted on adding something to the finished work of our Lord Jesus Christ, in order that people might be saved. They will usually add something of God's law, or something of their church's ceremonial ordinances or observances to what Christ has done for us. These additions to the gospel, Paul is saying here, are perversions of the true gospel.

These men thought that circumcision according to the law of Moses was necessary, as it was a sign of the covenant made with Abraham back in Genesis 17. But that was a covenant of God's purpose, to bring Christ in the fullness of time through Abraham's lineage; he being the first Hebrew, the first Jew. There was a promise given to Abraham and the rite of circumcision was performed, making the Jews a distinct and separate people unto God until the time that Christ came. The moral and ceremonial ordinances of the law were given to them as a people, and everything given was fulfilled perfectly and fully in the coming of Jesus Christ. It was Christ's perfect fulfilling of the law, both moral and ceremonial, and our faith in His having fulfilled it, that was, and it is, the basis of our salvation in Christ; not the ceremony of circumcision, or even the ceremony of baptism.

This is where so many people go astray in our own New Covenant times as well. They falsely add to the gospel, that water baptism somehow saves people from their sins. They falsely add to the gospel, in teaching people to believe, that in the baptism of infants, there is New Covenant grace. The grace of Christ is conveyed to the child in the observance of that ordinance. This is a perversion of the gospel, for the gospel teaches us that it is only by the exercise of faith in Christ and His finished work, that the soul is saved. What did the gathered council of apostles decide should be done? Verse 19 says that James, an elder in the church at Jerusalem, said this: "Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood." "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."

And when they drew up their letter which would be circulated among the churches about this matter, it says in verse 28 – "For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things." And they concluded by saying in verse 29 – "If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well." So, we see here, that the Holy Spirit helped them to these righteous conclusions about the gospel. Their righteous conclusion, with the approval of the Holy Spirit who was speaking directly to the hearts of the apostles, was, that it was not right to add to the gospel; in this case, anything ceremonial, or to impose any burden upon those who had become Christians except for them to abstain from idols, from ceremonies which involved sacrifice to idols, and from sexual immorality. Nothing was to be added to the gospel; they simply gave some further explanations which were necessary to keep oneself from evil.

So you see the believer in Christ has freedom from the ceremonial law, and freedom from the condemnation of the moral law, to then begin to do that which they have been called to do; live to the glory of God and love God by going about to do and keep His commandments. The reason that Paul places an Apostolic curse upon the false teachers bringing this, another gospel, was because it is absolutely essential that each and every believer hold fast to Christ and the truth of the gospel. The message of the grace which is found in Christ alone, believed and held fast to, will give the believer the ability to persevere in their faith until they see Jesus on the other side of death.