
One True Gospel (Part 2)

Overview

The Gospel Paul proclaimed is clear and concise. He now turns his attention to the matter of distorters among the Galatian Christians. Paul's warning to them has direct implications for Christians of all time.

Consider this...

Paul helps Christians understand the difference between those things that matter essentially and those things that, while important to varying degrees, are not essential to the Christian Faith.

Church communities often experience strife and disagreement. However, the greatest smudge on the church's face is usually that they have squabbled over something that is not really that important when compared with the essentials of the Gospel.

Every Christian must come to understand the difference between 'closed-handed' issues and 'open-handed' issues. Closed-handed issues are those things from which we cannot turn loose. These are essential matters to the Gospel, such as the deity of Christ, the unity of the Godhead, the sinfulness of sin, and the substitutionary work of Jesus. Open-handed issues are those things that are not unimportant, but are lesser in importance to the closed-handed issues. These are things that we may hold, but we do not have to use a death grip. Mode of baptism, ecclesiology, and eschatological matters are examples here.

Passage: Galatians 1:7-10

Application

- The Gospel is exclusive
- Distortions are prevalent and you should be ware
- Ultimately, each person has to decide whether he or she will look to others for approval or to God

Rejoicing in the Truth of Christ (Phil 1:15-18)

"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will.

The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel.

The former proclaim Christ out of rivalry, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment.

What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."

Galatians 1:7-10

Intro: While the Bible could not be clearer about the exclusivity of the Savior, the main character of the story the Bible tells, sinful humanity is inclined towards disbelief and confusion on matters of gravest importance. The Apostle Paul addressed this kind of truth-distorting activity in his day, and we are the beneficiaries of the godly wisdom he articulates. In the end, the question he raises is of upmost significance. “Am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God?” Well... Which is it for you?

7a not that there is another...

- **The Gospel is exclusive!**

- The Gospel is:

- It is the word of truth concerning salvation (Eph. 1:13).
- It is preserved, passed along, preached and proved (Gal. 2:1-9).
- It is the glory of God and assembled by sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:10-11).
- It is the power of God that brings salvation to all who believe (Rom. 1:16).
- It, by the power of God, illumines dark hearts and reveals the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4).
- It is, and always has been, according to faith/belief/trust (Gal. 3:8).
- It was progressively revealed by God throughout the Bible, including the Old and New Testaments (Gal. 3:8).
- It is a specific message concerning a specific work and person.

1 Cor 15:1-8 - “1 Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, 2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word [you will be saved] I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:

that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.”

- **There can never be another Gospel!**

- The Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of God, the Gospel of Truth is the only one that saves. Those who remain apart from, in disbelief concerning, or opposed to this one Gospel will never be free from the judgment of Christ. They will suffer Christ's vengeance and eternal punishment (1 Cor. 15:19; 2 Thess. 1:5-10).

7b there are some who... want to distort the gospel of Christ...

- **Distortion was the goal** (change, corrupt, pervert).

- Whatever their motivation, the distorters knew that their message was not the same as Paul's – and that is the point.
 - Fung – “No one would think of calling a substitute message a ‘gospel’ except with the intention of confusing the minds of believers.”¹
- Distortion of the Gospel equals the destruction of the Church “because the church is created by and lives by the gospel.”²
- Gospel distortion is tantamount to a reversal of the Gospel.
 - Notice the Gospel is that we are (1) saved by grace alone (2) for good works.³
 - Ephesians 2:8-10 – “8 For *by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,* 9 *not a result of works, so that no one may boast.* 10 *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”

- **People in every generation will want to distort the Gospel.**

- The Judaizers specifically, and people from all generations generally, intentionally want to distort / change / adjust / confuse the Gospel of Christ.
 - Chrysostom – “They had, in fact, only introduced one or two commandments [as additions to the Gospel message], but [Paul] says that the Gospel was subverted, in order to show that *a slight*

¹ Fung, 45

² Platt, 22

³ Platt, 23

*adulteration vitiates the whole [or renders it ineffective] (emphasis added)."*⁴

- All humans are sinful and are naturally opposed to the Gospel (Eph. 2).
- Paul explains in Romans 1:18 and following that the suppression of truth is humanity's natural desire. We, all humans, are inclined by default towards the perversion and corruption of the one Gospel, and it will be so until the final day when God judges all men everywhere (1 Tim. 4:1, 4:7, 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 2:15-17, 3:1-9, 3:13, 4:3-4; Titus 1:15-16; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 1 John 4:1-6).

7b there are some who trouble you

- **Who was *troubled* (disturbed or confused)?**
 - The Galatians Christians
- **What were they *troubled* by?**
 - A distorted or different 'gospel'
 - They were "deserting him who called" them and "turning to" this "different gospel" (Gal 1:6).
- **Why were they *troubled*?**
 - Because they weren't grounded sufficiently in THE GOSPEL.
 - Chrysostom - "You will not recognize another Gospel, so long as your mind is sane, so long as your vision remains healthy, and free from distorted and imaginary phantoms."⁵
- **How does one avoid such *trouble*?**
 - The one and only way that one can avoid or block the trouble of a distorted gospel is to train themselves well in the truth of the actual Gospel.
 - 1 Tim 4:6-8, 15-16 - "6 If you put *these things* (the truths of God) before the brothers, you will be a good *servant of Christ Jesus*, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather

⁴ Chrysostom, 16

⁵ Chrysostom, 15

train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come... 15 Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."

- This training of one's self in the true Gospel must always be coupled with a passion for unity among the congregation under the true Gospel.
 - Chrysostom - "A [lack] of zeal in small matters is the cause of all our calamities; and because slight errors escape fitting correction, greater ones creep in."⁶
 - Often, we count it an unimportant observation when a man says that he loves Jesus but wants nothing to do with church community or Gospel fellowship; and we see no alarm when another person, who once boldly professed Christ, now proclaims he is persuaded that there are multiple ways to God; and still further we think it is not appalling that someone would use the same vocabulary as the Bible while offering a totally detached message... Such complacency with distortions is what causes Christian assemblies to be perceived as a laughable exercise with moderately amusing members.

8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

- **The message is always most important - not the messenger.**
 - Messengers will come and go. Some will be more appealing and persuasive, while others will be more dull and uninteresting.
 - Messengers will vary in their motives. Some will be motivated by a desire to win public applause, some will hope to achieve a famous name, and others will seek to be a faithful servant of Christ.

⁶ Chrysostom, 16

- The Message is actually most important – always!
 - Messages that are distortions of the Gospel are dreadful poison, no matter how great the messenger is; and messages that are pure and faithful to the Gospel are life-giving nourishment, no matter how undesirable the messenger is.
- **We should be constantly asking, “Is this the Gospel?”**
 - Is my pastor preaching the Gospel?
 - Is my Life Group leader communicating the message of who Jesus is and what He did?
 - Is my favorite Christian author/speaker/singer presenting a grace-filled message of the cross of Christ or a works-based system of self-improvement?
 - Does my best friend encourage me towards a better understanding of the Gospel message, or are they contributing to my confusion about it?
 - Am I, as a parent/grandparent/uncle/aunt, communicating the single-most important message ever; or am I working harder at raising good rule-followers?

10 For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

- **What is does ‘seeking the approval of man’ mean?**
 - For Paul: He was being accused of giving one message to Jews and another to Gentiles. To seek the approval of man, it was said that he preached ‘law following’ to the Jews and ‘free grace’ to the Gentiles. This, it would seem, would make everyone love him.
 - For you and me: It is the pursuit of popularity and commendation over anything else.
- **What does seeking the approval of God look like?**
 - For Paul: He cast off his own country altogether, left his life-long companions, gave up his friends, dropped the comfort of close family relationships, and utterly lost his reputation. What did he receive in return for such sacrifice? Paul was persecuted, he faced the hostility of others, he was their object of nearly constant scorn among some group he had evangelized, he bore the emotional strain of mediating relational strife among his converts, and he accepted impending death on a

constant basis – in other words, he knew he would die a painful death sooner rather than later.

- **Notice the contrasting options Paul gives here.**

- *“If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”*
 - δούλος (*doulos*) – bondservant, slave, male servant
 - One who gives himself in glad service to another, no longer maintaining any rights or possessions of his own
 - The two options are both of service to another.
 - John 8:34 – “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a **slave** (*doulos*) to sin.”
 - Revelation 22:3-4 – “No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his **servants** (*douloi*) will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”
- Chrysostom – “He who wishes to persuade men, is led to act [in a complicated manner] and insincerely, and [he will] employ deceit and falsehood, in order to engage the assent of his hearers. But he who addresses himself to God, and desires to please Him, needs simplicity and purity of mind...”⁷

We are either:

- (1) both actively submitting to and humbly serving the God who saves, or
- (2) we are willfully refastening the chains of bondage that once held us as slave to sin.

The former is the result of a liberating association; the latter culminates in our ultimate demise.

⁷ Chrysostom, 20

Takeaway:

Which is it for you?

Are you actively submitting to and humbly serving the God who has saved you?

Or, are you living as though there is no divine revelation that proclaims the goodness and grace of God in the salvation of sinners like you?

Are you pursuing the knowledge of Him who called you out of darkness into light?

Or, are you living as though you and your own life experiences are the highest truth to be known?

Are you seeking to understand and trust in the Gospel that saves?

Or, are you allowing all sorts of distortions to cloud your mind and trouble your heart?

Are you looking for the approval of God?

Or, are you chasing after the approval of others around you?

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