

Galatians 1: 6-10—“⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- ⁷not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But 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. ⁹As 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. ¹⁰For 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.”

- Galatians is unique in that there are there no prayers, no praise, no thanksgiving and no commendation. Rather, after his brief salutation he immediately launches into the reason for his writing: their abandonment of the Gospel.
- The text today does not define the gospel (the rest of the book does).
 - So our focus today won't be on the content but the cruciality of the Gospel.
- The false teachers were evidently ‘Judaizers’, whose ‘gospel’ is summarized in **Acts 15:1**: ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’
 - They did not deny that you must believe in Jesus for salvation, but they stressed that you must be circumcised and keep the law as well. In other words, you must finish, by your obedience to the law, what Christ has begun. You must add your works to the work of Christ. You must finish Christ’s unfinished work.
- NOTE: The continuing conflict with the Roman Catholic Church.

“⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting

- He was **amazed** (*thaumazō*, a strong word, meaning to be astounded) and bewildered.
- “**Quickly**” (*Tacheōs*) can mean either easily or soon, and sometimes both, as was probably the case with the Galatians.
- “**deserting**” (*metathemenos*) signifies ‘to transfer one’s allegiance.’ It was used of soldiers in the army who revolt or deserted.
 1. Desertion was punishable by death during time of war.
 - The Greek verb is reflexive, indicating that the act is voluntary (not as the KJV suggest—“that ye are so soon removed”).
 2. **Example**: A certain Dionysius of Heracleia, who left the Stoics to become a member of the rival philosophical school, and Epicurean, was called *ho metathemenos*, a ‘turncoat.’¹
- The believers apparently offered little and ineffective resistance to the false teachers and therefore were fickle in their allegiance to Paul and his teaching.
- **MacArthur**: “The Galatians had been privileged to be taught by the greatest teacher the

¹ Cole, 41, 59.

church has ever known apart from the Lord Himself; yet they readily rejected the truths of grace they had learned from him. There is still a great and urgent need for preaching and teaching that continually repeats the central truths of the gospel (see 2 Pet. 1:12–15).”²

him who called you in the grace of Christ³

- “**Called**” is an aorist participle and could be translated, “who called you once and for all” (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13–14; 2 Tim. 1:8–9; 1 Pet. 1:15).
 - “The call spoken of in the New Testament epistles is always an effectual call to salvation (see Rom. 8:30).”⁴
- **Note:** Paul doesn’t say that their theology was corrupt. Nor does he say that they had deserted the gospel *per se*. He says that they have deserted **Him**.
- **Stott:** “The defection of the Galatian converts was in their experience as well as in their theology. He accuses them not of deserting the gospel of grace for another gospel, but of ‘deserting **him** who ‘called’ them in grace. In other words, theology and experience, Christian faith and Christian life, belong together and cannot be separated. To turn from the gospel of grace is to turn from the God of grace. It is impossible to forsake it (the gospel) without forsaking Him.”⁵
- The Judaizers claimed to be Christians, and much of their doctrine was orthodox. They must have recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah and even acknowledged the value of His sacrificial death on the cross—otherwise they would never have gotten a hearing in the church. They claimed to believe all the truths that other Christians believed.
- **Ills.** Teaching in Tahiti: “The Jehovah’s Witness don’t like to be called cult...”

and are turning to a different gospel—

- The Galatian Christians not *only* were being confused and weakened in their confidence to live by grace but were actually **deserting**.

⁷not that there is another (*allos*—another of the same kind) one,

- Although it might appear that the Judiazers were simply offering a different gospel, or simply a better outfitted gospel, Paul points out that in reality their gospel is altogether different—despite whatever similarities they may seem to have.
- **Ills.:** Mormons coming to the door. When they told me that they wanted to tell me about “the gospel” I asked them, “Which one?”

² John MacArthur, Jr., *Galatians* in *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary Series* (Chicago Moody Press: 1987), n. p.

³ For an excellent treatment of the time sequence of Paul’s writings, see Merrill C. Tenney, *Galatians: The Charter of Christian Liberty* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957).

⁴ MacArthur, n. p.

⁵ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 23.

but there are some who trouble you

- **Are disturbing** (*tarassō*), which literally means to shake back and forth and therefore to agitate and stir up.
 1. Figuratively, it connotes deep emotional disturbance and refers to an unsettled mind.
 2. It is the word used of Herod when he heard about the birth of the King of the Jews. It was also used by Jesus in His command, “Let not your heart be troubled” (John 14:1).

and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

- To **distort** (*Metastrephō*) carries the idea of turning something into its opposite, of reversing and thereby perverting it.
- **MacArthur**: “The least bit of law that is added to the gospel of Christ reverses its character and turns it into that which is contrary to God’s gracious provision of salvation and sanctification based entirely on the merits of His sinless, sin-bearing Son. Law does not moderately pollute grace but reverses and destroys it. As a means of salvation, the two are diametrically opposite and cannot coexist. Grace can be destroyed, but it cannot be modified. It can be rejected, but it cannot be changed.”⁶
- Whenever the gospel is perverted the church is unsettled. To change the message of grace is to stifle and eventually asphyxiate the church.
- The churches of Galatia were being shaken to their very foundations by the false teaching, and here is, perhaps, the most troubling aspect of it all: They were completely oblivious to it (in the sense of its seriousness).

⁸But 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.

- The Judaizers who were misleading the Galatian churches probably had impressive credentials
 1. I.e., from the Jerusalem church
 2. authorized by James, the leader of that church (see Acts 15:24), etc.
- He expresses the wish that God’s judgment will fall upon them—‘*anathema*’ the curse of God
- Because of their deception, false teachers such as the Judaizers are even more dangerous than those who openly deny “that Jesus is the Christ.”

⁹As 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.

- **As we have said before** refers to an earlier visit, not to the preceding clause in the text, since **now** (*arti*) is an adverb of time.

⁶ MacArthur, n. p.

- Paraphrase: “What I said at that time I am saying again now”
- **Brown:** “The apostle repeats it to show the Galatians that this was no excessive, exaggerated statement, into which passion had hurried him, but his calmly formed and unalterable opinion.”⁷
- Why did he feel so strongly and use such drastic language?
 1. The first is that the glory of Christ was at stake. To make men’s works necessary to salvation, even as a supplement to the work of Christ, is derogatory to His finished work. It is to imply that Chris’s work was in some way unsatisfactory, and that men need to add to it and improve on it. It is, in effect, to declare the cross redundant.
 2. Men’s souls were also at stake. He knew that the gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation. Therefore to corrupt the gospel was to destroy the way of salvation and so to send people to eternal judgment. Paul was not writing about some trivial doctrine.
 - a. Jesus Himself uttered a similar warning to the person who causes others to stumble: “It would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea” (Mk. 9:42).

¹⁰For 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.”

- False prophets are also more interested in popularity than in truth. Their concern is not to serve the Lord but “to make a good show.”
- Peter says that they are in their work for money;
 - **2 Peter 2:3**—“In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up.”
 - **2 Peter 2:14b**—“they are experts in greed—an accursed brood!”

Application:

A. What is at stake in getting the Gospel right is of enormous importance.

- Some people take great issue with the strength of Paul’s language here.
 - It doesn’t seem to reflect a loving God. As for actually desiring false teachers to fall under the curse of God, the very idea is utterly inconceivable to many. It doesn’t seem very “Christ-like.”
 - **C. H. Dodd:** “Sometimes I think Paul is wrong, and I have ventured to say so.”⁸
- Far from contradicting the Spirit of Christ, was actually expressing it.

⁷ Brown, 48.

⁸ C.H. Dodd, *The Epistle to the Romans* in *The Moffat New Testament Commentary* (London: Hodder, 1932), xxxiv.

- **Stott:** “I would venture to say that if we cared more for the glory of Christ and for the good of the souls of men, we too would not be able to bear the corruption of the gospel of grace.”⁹

B. There is only one gospel. The underlying truth of the passage is that there is only one gospel.

- In verse 6 Paul says that the Galatians are starting to turn away to a "different gospel." Then in verse 7 he carefully says, "Not that there is another gospel, but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel." This verse is very clear: There is *no other gospel* than the one he preached
- The popular view is that there are many different ways to God, that the gospel changes with the changing years. But Paul would not endorse these notions. He insists here that there is only one gospel and that this gospel does not change.
- 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.
- **MacArthur:** “Christians are to have nothing to do with false teachers, no matter what their credentials. It is both naive and unscriptural to believe, for instance, that staying in a religious school or church that denies the Bible and distorts the gospel gives a believer the opportunity to be a positive influence for the Lord. Even a leader like Timothy, well trained in divine truth, was warned to stay away from error and to concentrate on the pure truth of God (1 Tim. 4:6–7, 13; 2 Tim. 2:15–17).”¹⁰

C. The Gospel can be recognized by at least two distinguishing marks.

- The substance of the Gospel (what it is) and
- The source of the Gospel (where it comes from).

1. The Substance of the Gospel:

- You cannot touch the gospel and leave the church untouched. The church’s greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it, but those inside who try to change the gospel. The people in verse 7 were professing Christians. This is what makes bad theology so bad.
- **MacArthur:** “In the life of the churches, Paul feared nothing so much as false doctrine, since it is the underlying source of ungodly behavior. His deep concern for the spiritual welfare of the Corinthian believers would be fully as apropos for the church today. “I am afraid,” he wrote, “lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” by one who “comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you

⁹ Stott, 25.

¹⁰ MacArthur, n. p.

receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted” (2 Cor. 11:3–4).”¹¹

- Keep in mind that to abandon the Gospel is not simply to change your theological position. It is to abandon “him”! This is why those who turn away come under God’s curse—they have abandoned Him.
- In *2 Thessalonians 1:9* Paul said that those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus “shall suffer the punishment of eternal destruction and exclusion from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”
- *When a person rejects the gospel, the free, gracious gift of God's forgiveness and kingship, then he remains under the divine curse for his sin—a terrifying prospect because of its torment and unending length.*
- *Acts 20:28–30*—“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. ²⁹I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”
- *Stott*: “The only way to be a good churchman is to be a good gospel-man. The best way to serve the church is to believe and to preach the gospel!”
- The devil disturbs the church as much by error as by evil. When he cannot entice Christian people into sin, he deceives them with false doctrine.

2. The Origin of the Gospel (where does it come?):

- The true gospel is the gospel of the apostles of Jesus Christ, in other words, the New Testament Gospel.
 - The criterion, by which all systems and opinions are to be tested, is the gospel which the apostles preached and which is now recorded in the New Testament. Any system ‘other...than’ or ‘contrary to’, or ‘at variance with’ this apostolic gospel is to be rejected.
 - Anybody who rejects the apostolic gospel, no matter who he may be, is himself to be rejected. He may appear as ‘an angel from heaven’. In this case we are to prefer apostles to angels. We are not to be dazzled, as many people are, by the person, gifts or office of teachers. We judge them by the gospel; we do not judge the gospel by them.
 - *Alan Cole*: “The outward person or the messenger does not validate his message; rather, the nature of the message validates the messenger.”¹²
 - *Luther*: “[Justification is] the chief article of Christian doctrine. To him who un-

¹¹ MacArthur, n. p.

¹² R. Alan Cole, *The Epistle of Paul to the Galatians in the Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Tyndale Press, 1965).

derstands how great its usefulness and majesty are, everything else will seem slight and turn to nothing. For what is Peter? What is Paul? What is an angel from heaven? What are all creatures in comparison with the article of justification? For if we know this article, we are in the clearest light; if we do not know it, we dwell in the densest darkness. Therefore if you see this article impugned or imperiled, do not hesitate to resist Peter or an angel from heaven; for it cannot be sufficiently extolled.”¹³

D. Doctrinal maturity is not a luxury. Another implication is that doctrinal maturity at Northlake is not a luxury; it is a necessity. If a "different gospel" can spring up inside the church, then surely we must make it our aim to become rigorous and discriminating in our doctrinal knowledge.

- This is also why it is so important to keep watch over our lives *and* doctrine.
- *1 Corinthians 14:20*—²⁰“Brothers, stop thinking like children. In regard to evil be infants, but in your thinking be adults.”
- *Piper*: “Galatians is one of the best books in the Bible for helping us refine and clarify what the heart of the gospel is, which can't be replaced or altered. There is a tragic pattern in churches and in history, I think. Renewal breaks forth on a church or on an age through a fresh encounter with the gospel and the Spirit. Hearts are filled with the love of Christ, and mouths are filled with praise. The concern for evangelism and justice rises. But in all the glorious stirrings of heart there begins to be an impatience with doctrinal refinements. Clear doctrine requires thought, and thought is seen to be the enemy of feeling, so it is resisted. There is the widespread sense that the Holy Spirit will guard the church from all error, and so rigorous study and thought about the gospel are felt to be not only a threat to joy but a failure of faith. The result over a generation is the emergence of a people whose understanding of biblical teaching is so hazy and imprecise that they are sitting ducks for the Galatian heresy. It arises right in their midst.”¹⁴
 - *Put simply*: “Legalism is seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and acceptance by God through obedience to God.”¹⁵
- The full meaning of justification, as pardon and imputed perfection, has proved to be a mighty antidote to despair for the saints. Why? Because we know that our measure of obedience, even on our best days, falls short of God’s perfect standard. Our hope for acceptance with God and eternal life is the righteousness of Christ.
- John Bunyan, the author of *Pilgrim's Progress*, was tormented with uncertainty about his standing with God until this doctrine broke in on his soul.
- *John Bunyan*: “One day, as I was passing into the field, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul’: Thy righteousness is in heaven.’ And I thought that I could see Jesus Christ at God's right hand. Yes, there indeed was my righteousness, so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say about me that I did not have righteousness, for it was standing there before Him. I also saw that it was not my good feelings that made my righteousness

¹³ Martin Luther, from his exposition of Galatians 2:11 in *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, 2 vol., ed. Ewald M. Plass (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 2:705.

¹⁴ John Piper, “When Not to Believe an Angel,” February 6, 1983, http://www.desiringgod.org/Resource-Library/Sermons/ByScripture/7/376_When_Not_to_Believe_an_Angel/.

¹⁵ C.J. Mahaney, *Breaking the Rules of Legalism*, <http://killdevilhill.com/phorum/read.php?f=72&i=215&t=215>.

better, and that my bad feelings did not make my righteousness worse, for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, and today, and forever' (Hebrews 13:8). Now indeed the chains fell off my legs; I was loosened from my afflictions and irons. My temptations also fled away so that from that time forward those dreadful scriptures terrified me no more. Now I went home rejoicing because of the grace and love of God, and went to my Bible to look up where the verse was found that said, 'Thy righteousness is in heaven.' But I could not find it. And so my heart began to sink again, until suddenly, there came to my remembrance 1 Corinthians 1:30 - Who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."¹⁶

- **Carson:** "Western evangelicalism tends to run through cycles of fads. At the moment, books are pouring off the presses telling us how to plan for success, how "vision" consists in clearly articulated "ministry goals," how the knowledge of detailed profiles of our communities constitutes the key to successful outreach. I am not for a moment suggesting that there is nothing to be learned from such studies. But after a while one may perhaps be excused for marveling how many churches were planted by Paul and Whitefield and Wesley and Stanway and Judson without enjoying these advantages. Of course, all of us need to understand the people to whom we minister, and all of us can benefit from small doses of such literature. But massive doses sooner or later dilute the gospel. Ever so subtly, we start to think that success more critically depends on thoughtful sociological analysis than on the gospel; Barna becomes more important than the Bible. We depend on plans, programs, vision statements – but somewhere along the way we have succumbed to the temptation to displace the foolishness of the cross with the wisdom of strategic planning. Again, I insist, my position is not a thinly veiled plea for obscurantism, for seat-of-the-pants ministry which plans nothing. Rather, I fear that the cross, without ever being disowned, is constantly in danger of being dismissed from the central place it must enjoy, by relatively peripheral insights that take on far too much weight. Whenever the periphery is in danger of displacing the center, we are not far removed from idolatry."¹⁷

¹⁶ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1978), 20.

¹⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry, Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 25-26.