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The Mission
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Galatians

If you would turn with me to the book of Galatians. We're going to take a break from our study of the minor prophets and do our best to make our way through this book for a few weeks this summer or however long it takes.

And so if you've found your place if you want to follow along, I'm going to be reading from the first chapter. And I'll read it in its entirety and then we'll come back and explain it a few verses at a time.

Galatians 1:1, Paul, an apostle (not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead), 2 and all the brethren who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

3 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ.

11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man.

12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ.

13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure, and tried to destroy it.

14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

15 But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace,

16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood,

17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.

19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

20 (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.)

21 Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.

22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea, which were in Christ.

23 But they were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith, which he once tried to destroy."

24 And they glorified God in me.

So Paul's letter to the Galatians is probably the earliest of the apostle Paul's letters. It was written somewhere around 49 AD. And like most of the letters from Paul, it's not very long.

In fact, most all of the New Testament letters are shorter than most newspaper articles that we used to read. And most of these letters can be read in ten or fifteen minutes or less depending upon how fast you read.

But even so, there's a lot here in these few pages, and this is a very powerful book with some even more powerful warnings.

And in verse 2 here in chapter 1, Paul makes it very clear that he's not writing this letter to just one church, but he's writing to all "the churches of Galatia." You see Galatia was not a city, but rather a region located in the middle of Asia Minor—in the region that we would consider as Turkey today.

And this is where Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey, which is recorded back in Acts 13 and 14. And if you'll recall, that

was a very fruitful mission trip, and many people came to faith in Christ in this region, in towns and cities like Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. And many New Testament churches were planted in the process.

And we know that Paul also returned to visit these churches on his second missionary trip in Acts chapter 16.

And of course, these were Gentile cities. And most of the new converts were Gentiles.

Now, they also had Jewish synagogues located there, and we know that because the Jewish leaders caused a lot of trouble for the missionaries when they came to preach.

But in spite of all that opposition, still, some of these Jewish people became Christians.

And so Paul is writing this letter to these young churches in Galatia. And most of his introduction in these opening verses is typical of his other letters. In these days, you signed your letter at the beginning, while today we sign our names at the end.

So the letter begins this way: Look at verse 1.

Galatians 1:1, Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.

Now, here Paul is stressing the fact that he has been appointed an apostle by the Lord Himself. He's not some self-appointed teacher; he is God's spokesman. And I believe the reason Paul starts out this way, is because he's about to deliver a very strong rebuke to these false teachers who are trying to lead these churches down a wrong road.

And so with Paul's normal greetings out of the way, he gets right to the reason for his letter in verses 6-7:

He says,

6 I marvel, or your version may say, I am astonished that you're turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,

And then adds in verse 7, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert or distort the gospel of Christ.

Now, Paul at this point doesn't tell us exactly what that false teaching was, but he makes it very clear that it was a very serious offense; and **so** serious that the gospel of grace was at stake.

And he's really taken back that so many of the Galatian Christians are following these false teachers. He can't believe that they're turning away from God's grace as the sole means of salvation, and that they're beginning to follow what Paul calls "a different gospel."

So the Apostle Paul is not dealing here with some minor issue in the church; he's dealing with a complete perversion of the gospel of grace.

And as we'll learn a little later in this letter, this different "gospel" was a gospel of works. It was a legalistic system of keeping the rules if you will. It was a return in essence to the Old Testament law.

And so, Paul issues this warning: He says in verses 8 & 9,

If we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, well, let him be accursed. . . . And then again he says: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, then let him be accursed.

And what he's saying is that the gospel that I delivered to you or the gospel Paul delivered to the Galatians in the beginning was, and still is the

true gospel. And any teaching that differs from that teaching, he says, you need to reject! Because to teach anything less, or to teach anything more is to be accursed, which simply means that the teacher is going to be judged, and he's going to be condemned by God.

Paul says even if an angel shows up and speaks to you and claims he's from God; if his message doesn't line up with the gospel that I taught you, then it should be rejected. It does not matter if it comes from some bright and shiny angel who miraculously appears. If his message is different from the Bible, or from what I taught you, then that's an angel that should be avoided.

Now, it may be hard for us to fathom, that people would actually be so gullible as to believe something like that. But truth is, even today millions upon millions of people follow religions that were supposedly revealed by the appearance of an angel.

For instance, an angel is credited with appearing to Muhammad in the early seventh century. And this angel supposedly gave him a message that would later form the content of the Koran. And it's a message that denies Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and denies the truth that He came to this earth to be crucified, and denies that He was resurrected from the dead, and denies His ability to save the lost from their sin.

An angel is also claimed to have appeared to Joseph Smith in 1823, declaring that Joseph Smith had been chosen to lead the true church on Planet Earth. And then other angels supposedly appeared to him after that and Joseph Smith eventually wrote the Book of Mormon. And this so-called revelation claimed that Jesus was only **one** of the sons of God, and that humans can reach heaven by living out the Mormon doctrine.

And even though that is a different gospel, today, there are millions of people who follow Joseph Smith, and nearly **two billion** people who follow Muhammad.

And so the apostle Paul's warning of a different gospel is just as important today, as it was over 2,000 years ago. And to be honest, there's no telling how many religions around the world have based their beliefs on angelic visitations. And that's why the Bible warns us, that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. That's in 2 Corinthians 11:14.

Now, in Galatia, Paul's opponents, which were often called Judaizers, they were trying to impose the requirements of the Mosaic law upon Christians. In other words, they were changing the "gospel of grace" into a "gospel of works". And again we have many religions today that do that same thing.

The Church of Christ is one of them. They require a person to be baptized in order to be saved and go to heaven. And don't misunderstand me, the Bible clearly teaches that a person who has been saved should follow the Lord's example and be baptized if at all possible. But baptism in itself, in no way, affects that person's salvation. It affirms their salvation by their testimony, and it's a symbol of their salvation, but it's not a requirement to be saved. And to teach that baptism is a requirement to be saved is a false teaching, and it's no different than what the Judaizers were doing in Paul's day.

And while we're on the subject, we need to talk about the Catholic Church and the Catholic religion. And again, I have many friends who are Catholic, but if they hold to the teachings of the Catholic Church, and if they believe and follow and practice those teachings; they're indulging in a false

religion. Because again this is a “works based” religion, which requires a person to perform certain works to get in to heaven.

John MacArthur in his commentary on Galatians starts off by spending a lot of time on this. And he begins by talking about Martin Luther and the Reformation. And I’m just going to read to you some of what he says. He says,

Five hundred years ago, in the year 1517, a monk and a priest by the name of Martin Luther, launched the Protestant Reformation. He did it by writing 95 theses, all of which condemned **some** practice in the Roman Catholic system. And then he posted those 95 condemning theses on the door of the Roman Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany.

And with the posting of those theses, the Reformation began. That was the first shot fired, and it would eventually be heard around the world.

He saw what was wrong with the Roman Catholic Church. And, in particular, when he read Galatians chapter 3 and verse 11 for himself, and when he came across that verse that says, “**The just or the righteous shall live by faith,**” he understood for the first time the true gospel.

And that statement, which by the way is found several times elsewhere in the Bible, caused him to have a real understanding of the gospel, and eventually brought about his salvation; and then gave force and power to his ministry; as God used him as a key participant in the great recovery of the gospel, which we know today as the Reformation.

But now let’s back up a little bit.

Before Martin Luther was a clear-headed theologian, he was a confused monk. Before he was a powerful force, he was a tormented failure. Before he had spiritual peace, he lived in constant spiritual pain. Luther was

depressed. He was so depressed fact, and so overwrought with guilt that he lived with constant anxiety and fear.

On one occasion when he was still pursuing a career as a professor of Law, he encountered a thunderstorm, and a bolt of lightening hit the ground very near to him. It terrified him to the degree that at that very moment, he committed himself to God to become a monk. And he truly believed that this lightening from God would come again and take his life if he didn't devote himself to God. And so he became a monk and moved into the monastery.

Well while in the monastery, he found that the road to salvation was very hard, very hard! In fact, it was not just hard for him, but it was obvious that it was hard for everyone. In fact, it was so hard that the Catholic Church invented a place called purgatory. And the purpose of purgatory was to purge the remaining sins of certain people, who were too bad to go to heaven, but too good to go to hell.

And there were a lot of people who evidently fell into that category. They were too bad for heaven, but too good for hell! And so they needed some purging, and so that was what happened supposedly in purgatory.

And I suppose the best that Luther could have hoped for was purgatory, because no matter what he did, he never could get over the reality of his own sinfulness.

And in the process, he was tortured day and night by this guilt and fear. In fact, he and the other monks were so tortured and so full of the fear of God, and so fearful of the wrath of God and the judgment of Christ, that they turned to Mary.

Mary, they were taught, was more compassionate than God the Father or God the Son. And so they would go to her, and plead with her, to plead with Christ, and to plead with God on their behalf, to grant them salvation.

So Luther was terrified of God and he was terrified of Christ. And he was taught, as were all the other monks, that salvation was by grace, but that you have to earn that grace.

In other words, you have to reach a certain point of worthiness. You have to accumulate a certain amount of merit to become worthy enough for God to give you that grace.

So in order to become worthy, Luther and the others went to great extremes to become worthy. They were taught that if they starved themselves they could become more worthy. And so they ate basically only bread and water. And just enough of that to stay alive.

They were also told that if they struggled with uncomfortable clothing and put something in their shoes to cause them constant pain and something around their waists to inflict pain, that those things would also help them become more worthy.

So they did all these things and many more in an effort to become worthy of the grace of God.

He and the others knew they didn't have the merit they needed, and so they did all these things they were taught to do to try and receive it.

But still it wasn't enough.

And so the church came up with another means to gain worthiness. They came up with a system where merit could be passed down from one person to another. In other words, if someone died and they had more merit than they needed to become worthy, then that merit could be passed down to someone else.

They had this thing called the treasury of merit, and it was like a bank full of merit and when someone had too much merit, it went into this bank and was made available to those who didn't have enough.

And to make a withdrawal there were certain things you had to do; like visit the imaginary bones of Peter, or view relics of the cross, or milk from the breast of Mary, or the blood of the martyrs.

Martin Luther himself walked 800 miles to Rome, and then 800 miles back, and when he got to Rome he went there to ascend the Scala Sancta, which were supposedly the holy steps that the Lord went up, when He went into Pilate's judgment hall. They supposedly transported from Jerusalem to Rome, so sinners could gain merit if they crawled up those steps and kneeled at every step, and bowed down and kissed each step, all the way to the top.

But none of those things gave Martin Luther any peace. He knew he was lacking a genuine salvation experience. And what was driving Luther to this level of terror and fear was the fact that he desperately wanted to be right with God.

He understood God, and he understood God's wrath, and he understood God's judgment, and he understood the reality of eternal punishment in hell. And there was no doubt God was drawing him to be saved. Because no-one can come to Christ lest he be drawn by God.

Romans 3 says this in verse 10

10 As it is written:

“There is none righteous, no, not one;

11 There is none who understands;

There is none who seeks after God.

**12 They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.”**

**13 “Their throat is an open tomb;
With their tongues they have practiced deceit”;
“The poison of asps is under their lips”;**

14 “Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.”

15 “Their feet are swift to shed blood;

16 Destruction and misery are in their ways;

17 And the way of peace they have not known.”

18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

there is no fear of God before their eyes.

So sinners have to be taught to fear God, but God has to do the convicting and the drawing.

Well, the Roman Catholic Church did a good job at teaching the fear of God. In fact, Luther was so afraid of God that it tortured him. And so he wanted God to forgive him; and he wanted God to accept him. And he wanted to escape hell; and he wanted to enter heaven.

And even as a monk in a monastery he was doing everything he could possibly do to satisfy his own heart and find relief for his fear and guilt even to the point of inflicting extreme torment on his soul and body.

In fact, here’s a quote from Martin Luther: He said, “I tortured myself with praying, fasting, keeping vigils, and freezing. He said the cold alone was enough to kill me. I inflicted such pain as I would never inflict again.”

But all of this self-imposed torture, along with all his sacraments, and pilgrimages, and other deprivations, gave him no peace, no rest, and no sense of forgiveness. They only increased the torment.

He was doing everything he could do, and God was not responding. He knew that he was by nature and behavior a sinner; and that God was by nature and behavior absolutely holy. And he knew the gulf between the two was infinite, and he could not cross that gulf by himself, and if left to himself, there was no way he could ever satisfy God.

And he was right. There is no way for us to satisfy the requirements of a holy God in our own strength. That's why it's called grace, because we're not only "not given what we deserve", but we're given what we don't deserve. We're given the gift of eternal life, which is something none of us deserve. We deserve eternal punishment in hell, but we're offered eternal life in heaven through Jesus.

And then Paul says this in verses 11-12:

For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

In other words, "I got it directly from the Son of God. I got it directly from Jesus"

And then Paul begins to share some of his own personal testimony. He writes in **verse 15, "[The Lord] set me apart even before I was born, and . . . He called me by his grace."**

And by the way, that is a good reminder that you and I are not an afterthought to God. He has plans for you. Plans that began even before you were ever born! And not because you deserved it, but because of His grace at work in your life.

And then Paul writes in **verse 17 that after his conversion to Christ, he “went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.”**

We’re not told this for sure, but He was evidently tutored privately by the Lord. And during this three-year training program, is most likely the time when Paul was given a personal tour of heaven, which he mentions in his second letter to the Corinthians in chapter 12:1-4.

Well, after this three-year period of isolation in Arabia and his time in Damascus, Paul writes that he returned to Jerusalem, and then, fifteen days later, in verse 21, he tells us that he headed to “the regions of Syria and Cilicia.”

Paul’s hometown was Tarsus, which was located in Cilicia. And so, Paul effectively returns to his hometown, but he returns a far different man than he was when he left. He now has his assignment which is to preach the gospel to the Gentile world.

So, this first chapter of Galatians gives us two warnings.

First, we’re not to judge ministers or ministries based on their prestige or influence. We have a lot of influencers today who are not worth imitating. But the true measure of a minister is how closely he is aligned to the Word of God.

Second, we are not to change our message, because of a changing culture. Paul’s message was the same, no matter where he went. It was the gospel of the grace of God, calling sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ alone. And that message has not changed in over 2,000 years. And if a shining angel shows up at your front door with another gospel, well, that’s an angel you need to avoid—no matter what. Amen!