

## ‘A different Gospel.’ (2)

A man in his front garden was attempting to fly a kite with his son. Every time the kite gets up into the air, it comes crashing down. This goes on for a while when his wife sticks her head out of the front door and yells, ‘You need more tail!’ The father turns to his son and says, ‘Son, I’ll never understand your mother. I told her yesterday I needed more tail and she told me to go fly a kite.’

So many times, when people communicate with one another the message actually gets mixed up. And as we continue in our sermon series from Paul’s letter to the Galatians we’re going to discover today that even the Gospel message can actually get mixed up. And it gets mixed up the point where it’s almost unrecognisable.

**Galatians 1:6+7** “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in 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.”

Paul expresses great astonishment and surprise about how quickly the Galatians have deserted the true Gospel. It’s almost as if Paul can’t believe what he’s heard, they’ve not long become Christians and left Judaism and now they want to mix Judaism with Christianity. No wonder he’s going to rebuke them later in **Galatians 3:1** and say, “**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified.**”

Now remember this church was only a few years old and Paul is amazed about how quickly they are accepting this legalistic teaching from these Judaizers. And so, Paul is trying to shock them into realising that there is a huge difference between what they are accepting and the truth of grace he had told them about.

In fact, he says they were slowly but surely turning away from the truth. And he’s writing to them to stop them from turning away from the freedom they had literally just gained in Christ. These Judaizers were presenting these Christians with a legalistic religion and Paul was having none of it.

In fact, he deals with this kind of legalistic mind-set over in Colossians too. **Colossians 2:20-23** “**Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!”? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.**”

Paul says this kind of legalistic religion looks good, sounds good but all it does is appeal to man and his outward performance of religion. And a little later in **Galatians 4** Paul is going to remind them of what legalism is really about. **Galatians 4:8-10** “**Formerly, when you did not know God, you were slaves to those who by nature are not gods. But now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable forces? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years!**”

Now this mind-set, this outward performance of religion isn’t anything new remember. When Jesus was rebuking the Pharisees and the Scribes, He tells the crowd in **Matthew 23**. **Matthew 23:6+7** “**They love the place of honour at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called ‘Rabbi’ by others.**”

You see loved ones there is something appealing about this kind of religion. These religionists like to create a religion that appeals to the carnal desires of men to walk ceremoniously before others. But the problem is it has rules and regulations in place where God hadn’t stipulated.

Oh, on the outside it looks good and looks appealing but like we saw the last time, this kind of religion can’t change the human heart. And all this religion produces is an atmosphere of judgementalism. You end up judging yourself and others, not by God’s standards but by your brethren’s standards.

Paul addresses this in **Galatians 6:13+14** “**Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh. May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.**”

In other words, because of the appeal of this different Gospel, the Galatians were chasing after what could be measured by sight and not measured by faith. They were deceived into thinking that performance of codes was the road to spiritual growth.

**But what was it they were running from?** They were running from their calling, they were running from the grace of Christ. The very thing which could save them, they were running from and Paul knew that these legalisers were actually attacking the grace of God. **8 times** Paul uses the word ‘**grace**’ throughout this letter and it means ‘**unmerited love**’ from God. And so, they are running from their calling, they were running from the grace of Christ.

**But what exactly was it they were running towards?** Paul says, ‘**another Gospel**’. The Greek word ‘**heteros**’ that is used here, is sometimes translated to the word, ‘**different**’. And the reason this gospel was different was because it was counterfeit, it wasn’t the real deal, it was fake. Now remember these Judaizing teachers were actually preaching the Gospel that Paul taught in reference to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. The problem was that they were teaching a Jesus plus Gospel. They were adding requirements to the grace of God, which in effect said that what Jesus did wasn’t enough.

Now loved ones, I don’t care how righteous you are, or how many good deeds you do publicly or privately. I don’t care how much Bible knowledge you have or if you’ve been a Christians for thirty years. You have not and cannot do enough because Jesus did it all.

He paid a debt He did not owe, I owed a debt I could not pay.  
I needed someone to wash my sin away.  
And now I sing that brand-new song: Amazing Grace,  
Christ Jesus paid the debt that I could never pay.

**Romans 1:16 “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”**

What Paul is saying to the Galatians is that if anything is added to or taken away from the message he first preached to them, then you need to know it’s a counterfeit gospel. And if we get anything from this letter of Paul’s we need to understand this. Any legalistic system of religion not only destroys the fellowship of the church and the spirituality of the believers, but it also destroys our relationship with God. No wonder Paul says over in **Galatians 5:4 “You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace”**.

Now notice Paul didn’t name those who was causing so much confusion. I find that interesting because if this was happening today there would be email’s and letters with people names scattered all over the place calling them false teachers. Now we don’t know their names but we do know what they were doing. **Acts 15:1 “Certain people came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the believers: “Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.”**

These people were causing tension in the church by their additions to the one true Gospel. Now these teachers hadn’t yet succeeded in completely leading the church astray, but Paul knew there was a real danger of that happening. **Galatians 4:17 “Those people are zealous to win you over, but for no good. What they want is to alienate you from us, so that you may have zeal for them.”** And so, what was happening was, these false teachers were causing trouble by binding on the church those things God had never bound.

**It was Charles Spurgeon who once said, ‘I have found, in my own spiritual life, that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular morning and evening prayer is one which is indispensable to a believer’s life, but the prescribing of the length of prayer, and the constrained remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may gender unto bondage, and strangle prayer rather than assist it.’**

Paul says they ‘**are perverting the true Gospel**’ which means they were changing the Gospel into a legal system of justification. In other words, they were doing what John wrote about in **2 John. 2 John 9+10 “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take them into your house or welcome them.”**

When anyone adds to God's redemption of man by His grace, he is going beyond what God requires for salvation. They are going beyond the teaching of Christ and those who bind where God hasn't bound, have gone beyond the freedom that we have in Christ. And this was an issue that Paul addressed in **Galatians 5:1** "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Loved ones, the legalist is working in order to earn or merit their reward that is based on their performance of law. **Someone once said, 'If moral behaviour were simply following rules, we could program a computer to be moral.'** But what's the attitude of the grace centred Christian? Why do they do good works and try their best to please God? **1 Corinthians 15:10** "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."

The grace centred Christian do good works and try to please God because they know they are saved by grace. We can't save ourselves and since it's impossible for us to save ourselves, God ordained for us, in our place, One who took upon Himself all the punishment we deserve. In other words, Jesus fulfilled the law for us, He prevented the judgment of God from us and appeased God's wrath. Grace, loved ones, costs us nothing, but is cost Another a lot to get it for us. Grace was purchased with an incalculable, infinite treasure, the Son of God Himself.

Paul continues and says in **Galatians 1:8+9** "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!" Now there's no mistaking how serious Paul is concerning this matter.

He says, 'let me tell you something, if any heavenly being preaches anything which isn't in line with what he taught, then God help them'. That word 'curse' is an interesting word, in Greek it is the word 'anathema' and it means to 'ban' or 'excommunicate'. But Paul takes the meaning even further, he's talking about total destruction.

**2 Thessalonians 1:8+9** "He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might." Paul is saying that these Judaizers will suffer because they are denying the all-sufficient atonement of the cross that came by the grace of God. And he's so serious about anyone perverting the Gospel that he tells them twice what will be their outcome.

And so, Paul continues, this time trying to reason with them a little deeper. **Galatians 1:10** "Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Paul very quickly contests those who were accusing him of seeking the favour of human beings by preaching those things that pleased men. In other words, Paul was telling them the truth which is something he will remind them of again over in **Galatians 4**. **Galatians 4:15** "I can testify that, if you could have done so, you would have torn out your eyes and given them to me."

And let's be honest here, there's not a Christian alive who can please all the people, all of the time. **Matthew 6:24** "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." And remember that Paul is not preaching in order to escape the persecution of those Judaizing teachers. Paul understood all too well what persecution was all about, he was on the receiving end of it many times.

But he also understood that these legalistic brethren were trying to avoid persecution. **Galatians 6:12** "Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ."

Take a moment to read through the **Book of Acts** and you will soon discover that these unbelieving Jews followed Paul from city to city, making plots to stir up the audience against him or plots to kill him. And if Paul were preaching to please men, then he certainly wouldn't have been enduring this constant persecution. Loved ones, you need to know that legalists are just preaching for their own benefit, not yours.

**Philippians 3:18+19** "For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things."

Now Paul is describing people here who profess Christ but their lives are denying what their lips are confessing. He calls them enemies of the cross. **Why?** Because they are walking in a way that denies the priority of pursuing Christ-likeness. In fact, Paul says here in **Galatians** that if he was preaching to please people, he wouldn't be a true servant of Christ.

**John Kenneth Galbraith**, in his autobiography, 'A Life in Our Times', illustrates the devotion of **Emily Gloria Wilson**, his family's housekeeper. It had been a wearying day, and he asked Emily to hold all telephone calls while he had a nap. Shortly thereafter the phone rang. **Lyndon Johnson** was calling from the **White House**. 'Get me **Ken Galbraith**. This is **Lyndon Johnson**.' To which the reply came, 'He is sleeping, Mr. President. He said not to disturb him.' 'Well, wake him up. I want to talk to him.' 'No, Mr. President. I work for him, not you,' was her reply. A little later when he called the President back, he could scarcely control his pleasure and the President said, 'Tell that woman I want her here in the **White House**.'

You see loved ones we need to ask ourselves, **Who are we serving?** Because if we're not serving the one True God who gave us the one True Gospel, then it may be because we haven't heard the True Gospel. Anyone who presents a different gospel from the Gospel you were taught, and obeyed, a gospel that says, '**you can be saved through trusting Jesus but you have do to something else to merit your salvation**'. And I wouldn't be a true servant of God if I presented to you another kind of gospel.

So, let me share with you what that Gospel is and these aren't my words, they are the apostle Paul's words. **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel, you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 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."

When Jesus said in **Matthew 28:19** '**go and make disciples of all nations**'. He's telling us that the way we make disciples is by simply sharing the good news that Jesus died, was buried and rose again three days later. The question you need to ask yourself today if this, **is that the Gospel you heard and were obedient to?** If not, you've believed a counterfeit gospel, that gospel can't save you. If you're not a Christian today, **do you believe the good news that Jesus died, was buried and rose again?**

Jesus wants to save you, He wants to save us all but we need to understand we can't save ourselves, no matter how good we are or how many good deeds we do. **Will you trust Jesus today and trust in His completed work at Calvary today?**