

Galatians: Free in Christ

No Other Gospel

Galatians 1:6-10

In all of Paul's other letters, after greeting his audience he either gives thanks or prays for them, but not here! The matter is urgent and arresting: there is no other gospel than the one he had already preached. The sole ground of our salvation is good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. We have to know what it is and cling to it for spiritual life, and Paul writes to them, and for us, so we can know how to love others in the same way.

Astonished at Desertion

Paul and Barnabas preached the gospel in the Galatian cities, strengthened the churches, ordained elders and returned to their sending church in Antioch to give a report, "all that God had done with them, that He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). This was likely in 46 A.D., and just a short time later Paul heard they were turning away from the gospel. Like Moses coming down the mountain and smashing the Ten Commandments, he is blown away by their faithlessness and lets them know it (v6). This is not inconsistent with wishing them grace and peace (v3); it's an expression of it. If things are not okay, it does no good pretending they are. God really did open a door, and they became Christians (v4), so Paul is right to be astonished. If he isn't astonished, then they were not established in the faith. But people really do make shipwreck of their faith, so this reaction is appropriate (cf. 1 Tim. 1:19). He doesn't want them to make the mistake of thinking there is another gospel so he confronts them in love. Do we have the same courage?

A Curse on False Teachers

By adding circumcision to the gospel, these false teachers were troubling the Galatians and twisting the truth (v7; cf. Acts 15:24). This is not an outside pressure, but one from within. The false teachers came from within the churches and would agree with the vast majority of what Jesus and Paul taught, but where they differed is the difference between heaven and hell. A cold, clear glass of water plus one drop of sewage is not mostly good to drink. This is not just a doctrinal difference. You can't mess with the gospel and love people at same time. Doctrine is not the opposite of loving people, but a prerequisite for loving people, and Paul wants the whole church to be able to make these distinctions. If the Galatians embraced this foolishness they would be on good-works field trip to apostasy (1 Tim. 4:16). They are rejecting God (v6). Paul loves them too much to let it happen. It doesn't matter who they heard from—another apostle, Paul himself, even Oprah—no one can alter the gospel. The word for "accursed" here is *anathema*, something that is devoted to destruction and cut off from Christ (cf. Rom. 9:3). Those who finally reject the gospel are choosing "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess. 1:9). These false teachers are signing people up for

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this destruction, so Paul intentionally says it again: they are accursed for doing so (v9). He is courageous to say it and we would be wise to believe it. False teachers want a domesticated gospel and a domesticated church they control. Paul is hardest on them the same way Jesus was on false teachers (Matt. 23).

A Free Servant of Christ

Who is Paul trying to please? Did he take a poll to see who was excited about the truth of Jesus and the curse upon His enemies? He can feel the weight of what he just said and so he tells them why he said it. Perhaps the Galatians wanted Paul to focus on mercy ministry and teach about the Holy Spirit. Of course he does both of these things and engages in a well-rounded ministry. But fighting enemies is what pleased God in this circumstance, so he kept it up. In our culture it is now impossible to be a Christian committed to the God and His Bible and not have certain people think you are an intolerant bigot. We actually have a cost to count. He sets up the choice: “For if I pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ” (v10). You fundamentally either serve men or Jesus, people or God. Without God, we are consumed by our persona—what we look like, what others think, how to fit in the right crowd, to have the right friends, to be accepted at work and on and on. But if we please God first, then we are free. If we love God, we are able to love our neighbor, and everything fits in its place. We are free from all insecurity and manipulative false teachers. Paul loved to serve and bless people, but only in so far as it blessed them up according to Christ (Rom. 15:2). Knowing the only gospel and loving the living God frees us to live a life of unfettered joy.