

# Galatians 1:6-9

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 15 January 2012

Preacher: Matt Coburn

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Will you pray with me? Oh Lord, we pray what was just sung, will you strip us of everything else that we depend on, that we might depend upon you. Lord, I pray that this morning as I preach, I pray for us as a congregation as we sit under your word this morning. Lord, will you do this work in us that we may see that in Christ alone our hope is found. Lord, wake up our minds on this cold day.

Lord, wake up our hearts this morning, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Just the other night, my wife, my sweet, gentle wife, had mentioned to me that I had disappointed her when I had spent an extra half an hour on the computer checking the latest sports news on ESPN, rather than spending time with her before we went to bed that night.

This was a perfectly reasonable request and expectation, particularly as she had just spent a bunch of time in her evening helping me finish a project with the hopes that once we were done that we might be able to sit and just talk together for a little while.

But I did not respond well to this. The response of my heart was a complex one. I felt ashamed because, you know, I knew she was right, that I had been wasting my time and was being selfish. I also felt judged and condemned, even though she had not judged or condemned me. I was hurt and I responded by being short and cold in my interaction with her.

[ 2 : 23 ] I cut short the conversation, walked out of the room, rather than engaging with her. And as I walked out of the room, in my mind, I was justifying myself, coming up with all the excuses why there's nothing wrong with looking at ESPN for a few minutes, why I deserved it.

I began a little pity party in my heart about how long a day I had had and how much, well, she just didn't understand and how I deserved it.

Foolishness. What utter foolishness. It is not that I had done anything wrong per se, but the response of my heart to her simply mentioning that she was disappointed.

What foolishness. You see, what happened between me and my wife that night was not simply a disagreement about time allocation for that evening.

Her disappointment cut to the very core of my being, of my understanding. You see, what I realized is that I desperately want to be right in everything that I do.

[ 3 : 43 ] I'm a pastor for heaven's sake. I want to please God and please everyone all the time. I want to be perfect.

I expect that I will do things right. And when people suggest that I don't, as my wife had that night, my sinful heart wells up with all this ugliness.

And do you see, as I saw, my performance, doing things right, that was my gospel in that moment. That was my justification before God and man. That was my hope that if I could really do things right, that I would be acceptable by God and by others.

And when I saw this false gospel and all these things kick in, shame, excusing, and anger, and then depression and discouragement when I saw how horrible it was, it made me realize why we're preaching on the book of Galatians.

[ 5 : 10 ] It made me realize why I am here this morning, needing the message that I, Lord willing, will bring to you. And why I hope you, this morning, are here as well.

I hope maybe that you can identify, it may not look exactly like it does in my heart, but maybe you can understand and think about, is there something that functions for you as a gospel in your life? Is there something, a false gospel, at work in your life today? For the book of Galatians was written to remind us of the true gospel and help us see false gospels for what they really are.

If you have your pew Bibles, you can turn with me to page 972. We're in Galatians chapter 1, and today we're going to be looking at verses 6 through 9.

Galatians chapter 1, verses 6 through 9. I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

[ 6 : 35 ] Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. 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.

As we have said before, so I say again, if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Right before this passage, Paul has given his brief greeting, and if you were here last week, you heard Nick unpack the incredible picture, the incredible invitation, the incredible expression of warmth, grace and peace to you.

And how he goes on to unpack that and say, grace and peace to you, because Jesus has died for your sins, because Jesus is delivering us from the present evil age, because Jesus has saved you, not according to anything you have done, but because of God's good, perfect will in your life.

And if this was a normal letter that Paul had written, and you can look through the rest of the New Testament letters and see this is true, Paul would say, grace and peace to you, and then he would go on and say, I give thanks for you.

[ 8 : 03 ] I am so glad to see God's work in your life and how you have encouraged me. But Paul cannot do that. With urgency and with passion, Paul directly addresses the church with an expression of concern for them and a warning, a warning that they are facing a serious issue, a serious problem in their midst.

And his message for the church of Galatia and for us today is this, beware, beware of deserting the true gospel of grace, for to reject it for any other gospel is spiritual disaster.

Beware of turning from the true gospel to a false one. So what I want to do this morning is three things.

First, I want you to feel, not just hear, but feel Paul's warning about the danger of false gospels.

Second, I want you to understand his judgment on those who promote false gospels.

And third, I want you to look with me at how false gospels may be at work in our life. So let's look at verses six and seven together for a minute as we think about Paul's warning to the Galatians because they have so quickly deserted the true gospel.

[ 9 : 43 ] And what is the true gospel here? Look with me again, beginning of verse six. I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting what? Not a worldview, not a system of beliefs, not even a creed, but you are deserting him.

Him who has called you in the grace of Christ. And it's not that we, that they have turned from God but believe the gospel rightly.

They've put it together, but Paul is saying you can't have one without the other. You can't have the gospel without God. And you can't have God without the gospel, the true gospel.

And he goes on to say this gospel is the gospel of God who called you in the grace of Christ. And friends, you have heard this word, these words so often.

It is so easy for these to become rote and almost meaningless words. But grace, God's undeserved favor towards you who deserve judgment.

[ 10 : 52 ] Grace to you in Christ because Christ has taken away that judgment and given to you instead acceptance, favor, love, forgiveness.

It is salvation in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. And it is truly good news.

And Paul doesn't unpack it all here. He's just done it in the verses before. He'll do it again for the rest of the book. So if you want to hear more, keep coming back. But what I want you to hear is that he mentions this, just say, there is a true gospel.

And Paul, no doubt, had in his mind some of the richness of the passage that was read earlier this morning from Isaiah 61.

When the prophet proclaims, the Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to preach good news. The same word that is here, good news, the gospel. Listen to me just so that you remember again how wonderful this true gospel is, this grace in Christ and how it works out.

[ 12 : 13 ] It is good news to the poor. It is binding up of the brokenhearted. It is liberty to the captives. It is the day of the Lord's favor. It is comfort for those who mourn.

It is gladness instead of mourning. It is rebuilding and restoring devastation. Instead of shame, there will be double portion.

There will be everlasting joy clothed with the garments of salvation and robes of righteousness. This is the language that Isaiah uses.

And I'm sure that Paul, knowing his Old Testament as he did, this would have been resounding in his heart as he said, this is the true gospel. God has called you into this.

God is working this in you in the grace of Christ. And this is why Paul is so astonished.

[13:12] What have the Galatians done? They've deserted it. They've rejected it. They've said, no thanks.

It's a word that is used usually to describe religious apostasy. That is, a conscious rejection. They weren't just slightly confused. They weren't just slightly misinformed.

but they were choosing to turn from the gospel to something else. Paul is astonished.

He is flabbergasted. He is slack-jawed. Are you kidding me? You're turning away from this and all that is wonderful about this to something else?

Yes. Why? Why is he so astonished?

[14:13] Partly it's because the true gospel is so good. But partly because these false gospels, look at me at the end of verse 6, there are no gospels at all.

There's no good news in them. Let's look a little bit. Think together about the historical context of what was going on in Galatia to hear that. Paul was writing to a church that he had probably founded during his preaching, his first missionary journey in Acts 13 and 14.

He had preached the gospel that we have talked about here this morning already. God's gracious act of covering sinners with the righteousness of Christ, forgiving their sins on the basis of Christ's death for them, and giving them new life in Christ.

Paul had preached and established this church on this gospel, but then after he left, others came along. Here, there are those who are, the word is actually the troublers.

The troublers. It's also in chapter 5, verse 12. These troublers, these false teachers has come along, and they didn't outright reject the gospel that Paul had preached.

[15:31] They just said, you know, Paul's a good guy, and you know, Jesus and everything, that's really important, but I think there's a little more to it than that, because what about the law?

What about Moses? What about the history of God's work in the world? And they came in and they said, Jesus is great, but you've also got to obey the law to be saved.

You have to sit under the law. You have to specifically be circumcised, you men, in order to be acceptable, to be acceptable to God, to be accepted as a part of God's people.

Well, why do you say this, Matt? This isn't in verses 6 through 9. I don't see this. Well, look ahead in chapter 5, if you want to look at me, chapter 5, verse 3. You can see what Paul is arguing against. He says, Paul writes there, verses 3 and 4. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law.

[16:43] You have fallen away from grace. Or again, in chapter 6, verse 12, you can look ahead there. It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they might not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

And so you see that later in the book, Paul is going to unpack more specifically this false teaching and why it was wrong. But at its core, it was a Jesus plus gospel.

Nick mentioned this last week. It is not Jesus plus nothing. It is Jesus plus something. It is Jesus plus you have to keep the law. Jesus plus you have to be circumcised.

And Paul, in verse 7 of chapter 1 that we're looking at, he says, it is a distortion. It is a twisting. Twisting so that it's not even what it once was.

The word distortion is used in other parts of scripture. Talk about the transformation from daylight to darkness. Or, in the Old Testament, turning water into blood.

[17:59] It is a corruption, a perversion, such that ultimately, a Jesus plus gospel is no gospel at all.

It is not good news. Because it means that ultimately, my obedience is what I stand before God with.

Jesus is nice, but I have to be obedient too. And what a frightening thing that is. And Paul sees this too. It brings him trouble.

Trouble in the minds of the believers. What does it mean to be saved? How can I be confident that I am God's and that he has accepted me? where do I go when I feel and fall into shame,

condemnation?

It also brought trouble to the community. We'll see in chapter 2 that keeping the law became a divisive issue in the community of believers.

[ 19 : 06 ] believers. And so, false gospels, they are no good news at all. They are distortions that bring trouble. Paul wants us to hear how serious this is.

His astonishment that you would turn from such a great good news that God has accepted us on the basis of Christ alone to something else that depends on you.

Paul then goes on. Verses 8 and 9, you see more of Paul's passion, his urgency. He uses strong language here as he pronounces judgment on those who have brought the false gospel to them.

He says, it does not matter where it came from. If I, the one who founded your church, Paul, brought it to you, if an angel from heaven in a display of supernatural power, if I, standing here in this pulpit this morning, family, if your parents, whom you love and adore and honor, if your university professor who has a brain three times your size, if some supernatural experience, it does not matter.

If it was the one who brought you to Christ in the first place, or if it's some rock star preacher that you read about and hear on the internet, Paul says, it does not matter.

[ 21 : 01 ] If anyone brings to you a gospel contrary to the one that I preached, Jesus alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, let him be accursed.

it is the strongest way Paul can say it. He is wishing for God to curse them who bring it. In modern day parlance, it might sound like this.

If they preach another gospel, they can go to hell. Literally. The word accursed here is a strong word.

Church history, you may have heard it. Anathema. It's been used in church discipline throughout the years. Some people would see that that's what Paul is doing here.

He's doing a power play and he's saying, they preach something else, I don't agree, kick them out. But I don't think that's actually what Paul is saying here.

[ 22 : 11 ] This word was used in the Old Testament in certain places. For instance, when the nation of Israel was entering into the promised land, there would be certain times when as they were overcoming the ungodly people who lived in Canaan, there were times when God said, set apart the spoils of this victory for destruction.

Do not keep it for yourself as a blessing, but set it apart for judgment, for burning, for destruction. it is of no use to me except to be destroyed, that you might know that I am God and I am holy and there is no other.

So in Joshua 7, you see this, if you remember the story of Achan, who took items that were, in the old translations, under the ban, for those of you who remember that phrase, devoted to destruction is how the ESV translates it.

And that's what Paul is saying. If you teach, if you promote, if you espouse, if you embrace a false gospel, may you be under God's judgment.

trusting in the gospel of Jesus plus our good works means that we stand on our own. And we will be under God's judgment because we cannot stand before a holy God in our sin.

[ 23 : 55 ] And that is hell. And that is eternity of judgment. And that is why Paul cares so much. Now, for some of you may be sitting here, sitting among us this morning, it's an easy response to have.

How can Paul say this? I mean, come on. Really? Isn't Paul just being arrogant? Isn't he just saying, hey, I want to win, so I'm just going to pull out my emotional trump card and my judgment card so that I can win this little theological spat?

Isn't this just theological nitpicking? And you know what? Some of that fear is justified. Because when we look through the history of the church, don't we see this?

Don't we see that there have been times when a mountain has been made out of a molehill? people? And where people have not just disagreed, but brought accursed anathema upon one another on the basis of church government, mode of baptism, what elements are used in communion, the timing of the end times, and have divided believers in unhelpful ways.

And isn't this what, how is what Paul is doing different? Well, for Paul and for us, Paul is reminding us there is a central core to the gospel.

[ 25 : 35 ] There is a deposit once for all delivered to the saints, a core of reality and truth about Jesus and salvation that if it is distorted, changed, marginalized, undermined, there is no good news at all.

And the truth of the gospel is at stake. It is not judgmental. It is not divisive. It is not theological nitpicking.

But it is love. It is love to confront. It is love to point out. It is love to say that is not the true gospel. love to God. It is love to love to God. It is love to love to love to love to these. There is lots more to be said about how to parse out when is it essential and worth fighting for and cursing for.

When is it secondary? I have great conversations come talk to me afterwards if you'd like but what are we to do about this how are we to respond friends I want you to to own with me a desire and a passion for our church that we would resist the false gospels in our world today and maybe in our hearts today by knowing the gospel the true gospel deeply pursue it don't assume that you already know it or know it well enough go down to the book stall get some good books come to Sunday school if nothing else keep coming to hear the true gospel as we preach it through the book of Galatians Lord willing and if we don't come tell me because that's a problem

[ 27 : 43 ] Paul is exhorting us to beware of these false gospels because it is such a severe thing and in closing I want to examine some of the dynamics of how we individually and corporately might be prone to embrace a false gospel I think there are two different ways that this might happen first is that we might embrace what I'll call theologically false gospels that would be where the content of the message is just not right this was part of what was going on in Galatia there was a gospel plus message that was being proclaimed in our world today there are many world religions and many of them not all but many of them are based in at some level a gospel of human effort a gospel of self-justification before God if I do just the right things in just the right ways in my religious rights and practices

I will be acceptable and I will be saved in Christendom in the church over time in history there are those who have called themselves Christians but who have ultimately preached a different gospel and we must beware of this so for instance a church that would preach that baptism is required as a precondition for salvation has added to the gospel of the grace of Christ for heaven's sakes we're a Baptist church we love baptism but not when it is a precondition of Christ but you know the theological issues are out there and we need to beware of them and we need to be thoughtful about them but I think I had if I could guess

I think that the greater amount of struggle that we have with holding to the true gospel is going to be in the second category which I'm going to call a functional false gospel and that is it's the default mode Nick helpfully pointed out to us last week that if we gave a quiz I think most of you would pass with flying colors are we saved on the basis of Christ's work on the cross for us or on our righteousness and our good deeds which one A or B okay well I think we're going to get the theological answer A right most of the time but like me in this past week that theological gospel that is right isn't the gospel in my actual life I have a different functional savior for me it's my performance meeting my own expectations that we turn to how might you see if there's a functional false gospel in your life one of the key ways to see if there's a functional false gospel in your life is to look at the fruit in the moment when you see some kind of sin something you don't like something you're ashamed of a problem an anxiety or worry or insecurity or jealousy that's what that wells up in your soul maybe you can start to ask yourself why what is it what is it that I'm trusting in or what is it that I want to trust in that's being threatened being challenged being taken away when we can answer that question we can begin to see the functional false gospel or false gospels in our lives and we must feel the urgency that Paul has and the passion that he has that both of these false gospels a theological or a functional false gospel they spring from a similar pattern

I believe and that's that ultimately salvation is about me it's about what I can do deep in the human heart we have this orientation that we want to make ourselves acceptable to God on some merit of our own we want to say that it's up to us because we don't like the humbling reality that the gospel says you can't do anything you cannot save yourself there is nothing you can do to please God but God will be pleased with you in Christ he will clothe you in Christ with the riches of his righteousness and his life and we sometimes resist that good news because it's humbling it cuts to the core of our pride and so we take hold of these false gospels because we want it to be up to us but you know what the end result it's terrible because if we think it's up to us we end up having two different outcomes one is we might succeed we might think

I have this false gospel that sets standards that I can actually achieve and you know what we become self-righteous proud judgmental condemning of others because they don't meet our standards or because they can't cut it they can't actually do it and if we don't succeed we fail it's maybe obvious right but if we don't succeed in saving ourselves and meeting our standards then we fail then we spend our whole lives trying desperately to overcome this failure and we either drown it in distraction or we fall and sink into despair and hopelessness that we will never be able to be good enough this is why for Paul the grace of God is such a rich and such a precious reality and why it is for us as well the hope of the gospel for us that Christ has done and is doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves so imagine going back to my wife and I the other night if I had believed in the true gospel

[ 35 : 34 ] I could have responded so differently to her expression of disappointment it might have been a simple conversation of saying I am so sorry honey I didn't know that's what you expected we just didn't expect the same thing over about that last half hour but I'm sorry that that's hurtful to you I love you please forgive me for not recognizing that it might have simply been a matter of communication and missed expectations but there would have been no anger no hurt no walking out of the room without engagement it also could have been that because I'm accepted in Christ and because I know my standing is firm I could have forsaken my defensive heart and said you're right it was sin I was being selfish I'm sorry will you forgive me instead of shame turning into anger towards her

I could have just said honey you're right Christ loves me but I'm a miserable sinner sometimes will you forgive me will you accept me all that flows from the true gospel security freedom joy forgiveness hope the true gospel really is wonderful and you know at the end of the day here's the good news not only did Christ die for us because we need the gospel the true gospel of grace in our lives but he died for us for the very reason that we don't like and resist and fail to take hold of the true gospel every day because even when we know theologically in our head and even when we affirm in our hearts on most days that we really are forgiven and free in Christ we will fail and Christ died for that too and this is the gospel of grace to us in Christ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us so that in Christ the blessings of Christ might come to us oh what a precious savior we have no wonder Paul is astonished that any would turn from him by the grace of God may we be kept in the true gospel as well let's pray Lord Jesus we are so prone to wander prone to leave the true gospel because we love to depend on ourselves

Lord I pray by your spirit Lord you would remind us this morning of how good the true gospel is and Holy Spirit would you do the searchlight work that you do in our hearts show us Lord where we have taken hold of error Lord whether it be theological or functional Lord whether there is a false gospel that rules our lives Lord may we heed the warning of Paul and turn back to your grace to the love you have shown us in Christ Jesus we pray this in his name amen