

No Other Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Happy New Year. I hope you all had a good Christmas holiday.! We are in the book of Galatians this morning. That is page 193 in the Pew Bible, if you'd like to turn! with me there. Last week we began our series in this book, and we'll be considering the message of Galatians for the next few months as we begin this new year and as we head towards Easter. Now, the book of Galatians is a book that is all about clarifying the true and real message of what the New Testament calls the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ. If you've been around Trinity for a while, you know that we love this word. We even talk about being a gospel-centered church, and we talk a lot about the gospel, well, because the New Testament talks a lot about the gospel, and because, well, the whole Bible is really all about this thing we call the gospel, and because the thing that has sustained and nourished and protected and advanced the church throughout its history is the gospel, the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. But here's the thing. It is very possible, some might even say inevitable, for churches and for Christians at times to get muddled and mixed up and confused about what the gospel really is. And that's what happened in Galatia in Paul's day, and it can happen again and again in our day and again and again in our own lives. And the results of that confusion aren't just unfortunate. They are disastrous. Galatians is one of the Apostle Paul's most passionate letters.

You know, when we're thinking about renewing the website for every sermon series, we think, hey, what would be a good verse to put on the home page of the website? There are a lot of verses in Galatians we probably would not put on the home page of the website.

Why? Even in our passage today, right out of the gate, we hear Paul speaking with passion and with urgency. He breaks from convention in typical letter writing and just gets right to the heart of the matter. No thanksgiving, no praise. He says, I'm astonished. Why such passion? Why such urgency?

Because when the gospel is at stake, everything is at stake. Everything. So let's turn to Galatians chapter 1, verses 6 through 10. And for context, I'm going to begin reading at verse 1, but we'll focus on verses 6 through 10 today. Let me pray as we come to God's Word. Father, help us now as we come to this passage of Scripture. Oh, Lord, our rock and our Redeemer, would You help us to rest and see and rejoice again in this glorious good news of our Lord Jesus Christ. We pray this in Christ's mighty name. Amen. All right, Galatians, picking up in chapter 1, verse 1, reading through verse 10. Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me to the churches of Galatia. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our

God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 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.

[4:12] 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 preach to you, let him be accursed. As 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. For 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. So here's the problem in the churches of Galatia. In the late 40s, the apostle Paul arrived in the region of southern Galatia, what's now kind of south-central Turkey, and upon arrival he proclaimed the good news of what the God of Israel had done in Jesus Christ. And as they heard this message, both Jews and Gentiles responded in faith. They received the good news for what it truly is, good news. And as a result, they began their new life under the lordship of Jesus, Israel's Messiah, and the world's true Lord. And the gospel had changed everything for them, their relationship to God, their relationship to each other, their relationship to the world, to themselves, to the future, to their work, to their trials, everything. But now, not long after that, sometime a little before 50 A.D.,

Paul needs to write to them because as he says in verse 6, they are turning to a different gospel. And as verse 7 immediately clarifies, this different gospel is really no gospel at all. Not that there is another one, Paul says. In other words, this different gospel is really a non-gospel. Other gospels may sound plausible at first, but in reality, they are no gospel at all. So what we see, what we can see in this, even in this opening paragraph, is Paul beginning to contrast and distinguish the true gospel from any non-gospel. Like the Galatians, we often struggle to tell the difference between the true gospel and what is a different gospel that is really no gospel at all. We have a hard time distinguishing the real from the fake, and if we're honest, we sometimes aren't sure why it really matters that much.

I mean, you have your version of the gospel, I have mine. Does it really matter all that much at the end of the day? Why bother? Well, let's take a look at some of these contrasts, both explicit and implicit, in verses 6 through 10, and let's find out. The first contrast that Paul makes is this. The true gospel exalts grace.

Non-gospels distort grace. Look again at verses 6 and 7. He says, "I'm astonished you're so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel." Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. Look at that phrase, "Him who called you in the grace of Christ." Him there refers to God, right? In particular, God the Father. And what, according to the true gospel, does God the Father call us to Himself with? The grace of Christ. There it is. The heart of the gospel is the grace of Jesus Christ. Grace, utterly unmerited favor and acceptance, purchased and won and freely given through the person and work of Jesus Christ. The true gospel exalts grace. It's a message of a lavish grace from first to last. I mean, consider if you were to summarize the gospel, how would you do it?

We often think of summarizing the gospel with four short words, God, sin, Christ, response, right? Well, let's walk through that. First, it begins with God, right? The triune God creates and sustains all things.

[8:57] If you want to learn more about the doctrine of creation, come next week, Sunday school, 9 a.m. Luke began us this morning. It was awesome. Check out the podcast. You can catch up. You can come. You won't miss a beat. Come at 9 o'clock. But according to the Bible, does God have to create the world?

Is God somehow obligated to make the world out of nothing and to give it being, to sort of make up for some kind of lack in His essential being or perfect beauty or perfect eternal happiness? No.

God creates you and me and the world and everything out of His sheer good pleasure simply as an act of grace. And He places humanity in the midst of His creation as His image bearers. And is this something that humans warrant through their own desert, through their own being? No. God imparts His image to us humans as a sheer gift. And He gives humanity a vocation, a calling to bear that image and to steward creation for His glory. So, the gospel begins with God, and even in the beginning, it's full of grace.

But of course, before we get to the heart of the good news, there's the bad news, right? Humanity decides to turn away from God rather than receiving and resting in our existence as a gift from God, rather than honoring God as God and living for God, the source of who we are out of His own gracious giving.

We push God away. We rebel against Him and act as if we can be a law unto ourselves. And this is the sort of absurdity that the Bible calls sin.

[10 : 56] Because here, as we talked about this morning in Sunday School, Luke so beautifully illustrated, here we rest in the branches of God's grace and love, just in our very being. And instead, we start to saw the branch off, thinking we can be gods unto ourselves.

And this sin brings death, spiritual death, and eventually eternal death. Rather than living under God's blessing as His creatures, we reject God and come under sin's curse. God, sin. But it doesn't end there. The third part of the good news is the heart of it all, Christ. God comes in the person of Jesus Christ, fully human and fully God. And because He's fully God, He actually does what no human being tragically had ever done. He actually loves God and worships God fully and completely. He lives a life of utter freedom and perfection to the glory of God. And because He's fully human, taking our nature into Himself, He does that for us. Because He's human, He can do it for us. And when He died on the cross, He died to bear the punishment for our sin. And when He rose on the third day, He rose as a promise that all who are united to

Him will also rise with Him to eternal life. Now, do you see, do you see that the center of the gospel is not the work that we do, but the work that Jesus has done? All that He purchases and accomplishes for us, a perfect record of righteousness through His life that warrants God's unmitigated blessing, a complete wiping away of our sinful record through His death, all of the curse done away, total assurance of new life now and forever through His resurrection, all of this is done by Him for us.

We were helpless, guilty, doomed. Our bankruptcy wasn't partial, but total. I've read recently that there are actually two forms of bankruptcy. Maybe this isn't true anymore. It was kind of an old book. For the reason there's two kinds of bankruptcy. One is sort of like, yeah, you're kind of in trouble, but maybe you can work your way out. And there's another kind of bankruptcy like, you're toast. Like, you lose everything, right?

I forget what title it, which one is. Some of you finance people can tell me afterwards. Right? Which one is our state? It's the latter. We're utterly forfeit.

[13 : 54] But what we could not pay and what we could never pay, Jesus gladly and in love paid in full for all who trust in Him.

He gave Himself, the beginning of Galatians says. So, you see, it's grace. It's radical, undeserved grace. He didn't have to save us. He didn't have to do any of it.

And we certainly don't deserve it. We had actually done everything to not deserve it. But He looked upon us in love and lavished His grace upon us. And now, here's the very radical thing.

And this will be the chord that Paul strikes throughout the book of Galatians. Now, there is no righteousness. Nothing.

We need to add to be made right with God. When you are united to Christ through faith, His perfect righteousness is credited to you.

[15:10] Is there anything that you could add to that? To warrant God's good favor towards you? To get a little more of God's blessing in your day to day?

Imagine you could take a spaceship to the surface of the sun. I know that's not possible, but we're imagining, right? Burning with the heat of a million furnaces. And imagine you're there in your spaceship and you roll your window down.

Because it's an old spaceship, so you've got to roll the window down like this. You take a matchstick, a little match, and you throw it into the fire. Would that matchstick add anything to the brilliance or perfection or heat of that star at the center of our universe?

No, nothing. No, nothing. And so there is nothing that you can add to the perfect righteousness of Christ that clothes you completely when you are united to Him.

And that means God the Father looks upon all those united to Christ with absolute, unchanging acceptance and favor.

[16:29] On your good days and on your bad days. And what sins? What sins are left for you to atone for?

You have a perfect righteousness, but what about all your sins? But consider what sins are left for you to atone for that His cross hasn't already paid. From the cross, Jesus Himself declared it's finished.

And that declaration, it is finished, standing at the center of redemptive history, stretches in every direction. Stretches back over your past sins, over all of your present sins, and even into the future over your sins yet to come.

It's finished. There's nothing left to atone for. The record has been wiped clean. And that means any wrath, any curse, any justice your sins rightly deserved are satisfied.

You see, in the gospel, God doesn't turn a blind eye toward our sins. He actually sees them fully and in more depth than you and I could ever know.

[17:45] An old pastor from the Philly area famously once said, Here's the good news. You're much worse than you think you are. God doesn't turn a blind eye toward our sins.

He sees it all. But He sees them as completely atoned for at the cross.

Justice has been fully satisfied when Jesus died for you. Nothing can be added. Nothing taken away. And so the gospel proclaims to sinners full and complete reconciliation with God, an ongoing life with God, an eternity with God, fully and totally, in every moment of it, by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

You add nothing to what He has done. You take nothing away. The only thing we can do is receive it.

This is the fourth part of the gospel, the response. To entrust ourselves to the risen Lord Jesus, to be united to Him through what the Bible calls repentance and faith. This is the response that the gospel calls for.

[19:09] Faith. What is faith? Faith is when we stop trusting in ourselves to be right with God and entrust ourselves to the risen Lord Jesus.

Faith is relying wholly on Jesus and on His grace and nothing in us to be accepted by God and to live for Him.

So the true gospel exalts grace. But non-gospels, on the other hand, they distort grace. We see this in verse 7 where Paul says, there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

It's interesting that the word distort there means not just to kind of confuse or to corrupt, but it even means something like to reverse, to kind of turn on its head.

Now how were these teachers who showed up at Galatia flipping or reversing the gospel? Well, it's clear from reading the book of Galatians that after Paul left, false teachers showed up who started to teach what was in essence a different gospel.

[20:14] And we see a glimpse of what they were probably teaching in Acts 15 that Kosh read for us earlier. It says, but some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, unless you're circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.

Now you can see why that message might have been plausible to these new churches in Galatia, right? After all, these teachers who showed up, they were from Judea.

Wasn't that where Jesus himself lived and taught during his earthly ministry? Wasn't that where the message of Christ originated and rang out from? They're from Judea. Talk about a pedigree. And not only were they from Judea, but they were advocating something that seemed ancient and rested on good ancient tradition, something even prescribed by Moses himself.

Just think of all the Old Testament passages these teachers could have quoted to show that God required circumcision under the Mosaic Covenant. How plausible it must have sounded to the Galatian Christians as these teachers came and said, yes, Jesus is the Messiah, but you still need to obey the law of Moses and be circumcised if you're going to be saved.

But Paul rightly sees that even though on the surface that sounds plausible, it's a distortion.

[21:42] It's a reversal of the true gospel of Christ, the radical fulfillment that Jesus had accomplished. Why?

Why was it a reversal? Because it was making a human work a precondition of God's grace and favor of their salvation.

Their message was basically saying that your obedience to the law must precede God's acceptance of you. First, you obey.

Then, God will save you. That's what they were saying. But you see, that gets it all backwards. The true gospel is that God saves you by His grace in Christ.

And then, in freedom and joy and the transformation of being saved by grace, then you obey. The false teachers were saying, obey in order to be saved, but the gospel says, God saves you by grace in order that you can even think about obeying.

[22:55] The false teachers were saying, become the right sort of person. You have to kind of take on this exterior thing of becoming a good Jew, getting circumcised, or whatever it is, right?

Become the right sort of person first, then God will save you. But the gospel says, in Christ, God rescues you by His grace, and then by that same grace, He'll make you more and more into the image of His Son.

You see, friends, any version of grace that makes it sound like you have to earn or warrant or achieve it isn't grace at all.

It's not a gift if you have to earn it first. If you've worked and earned something, even something so slight as circumcision, that's not a gift.

It's a wage. It's not grace. Grace is something you don't deserve and can't earn, and it has to come to you freely.

[24:09] At the cost of another, yes, but freely to you. Non-gospels distort this grace. The true gospel exalts this grace.

That's the first contrast. But what difference does this all make? Well, there are actually three more contrasts that Paul makes in this passage or that are kind of implicit in this passage, and we're going to go through them quickly to see why all this matters.

Here's the next contrast. The true gospel comforts the heart. Non-gospels trouble the heart. Did you notice how Paul starts his letter in verse 3?

As he gets going, he says, grace and peace to you. Grace and peace, friends, are inseparable. Where grace is received and experienced and believed, peace abounds.

That's why the true gospel comforts the heart because if your standing before God is based on the grace of Christ, not your works, not your performance, not your pedigree, not your position, then you will have peace because nothing can shake or change or diminish the grace of Christ towards us.

[25 : 17] It's a well that doesn't run dry. It began in eternity past and will run for all eternity to come. But non-gospels trouble the heart. Notice what Paul says in verse 7, there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

If you are standing with God, it depends on your performance or some work that you have done. even if you feel like you've just got to add a little bit to what Christ has done.

If that's where your standing depends, you can never have real peace because who's to say when the work is enough and who's to say you've done whatever that work is with enough sincerity or consistency because God doesn't just see your outward actions, He sees your heart motivations as well.

Who can say whether even the best of our good works were done for true love of neighbor and for genuine love of God and not some other mixed motive? After all, was it not also to look good?

Was it not also to prove a little bit that I'm a good person? Was it not also done in fear that I might not measure up? Now, at this point you might be thinking, but wait a minute, wait a minute.

[26 : 51] If God saves us completely by His grace, what motivation is there for doing good at all? I mean, if we have complete and total peace with God through Christ, why obey?

Now, that's a very understandable question and Paul will have a lot to say about it as we get to chapters 5 and 6 of Galatians. But consider just here in our passage the difference between a calm and a troubled heart.

Imagine two boats out on the ocean. One boat's sailing across the calm sea and the other is sailing across the troubled sea. Which sea is going to be more productive for sailing?

Well, of course, it's the calm sea, right? The wind fills the sails and the boat glides across the water to its destination. But consider the boat amidst the troubled sea.

On this boat, there may be a lot of activity. The crew is straining at the oars. They're tying down the cargo. They're fighting against the wind. There's activity and work on all sides.

[28 : 01] But are they getting anywhere? Just so, in the same way, a heart troubled by a non-gospel may look like a vessel full of activity wildly pulling at the oars.

But is that activity truly done for love of God and love of neighbor? Or is it also done for oneself or in competition with another or just in response to a weary, burdened, conscious trying to get relief?

You see, only the heart made calm by the gospel will then give rise to a life of genuine love.

when the storm of a guilty soul, when the storm of a troubled soul, a soul burdened with idols that can never satisfy, when a stormy soul meets Christ, when a stormy soul sees Christ clothed in all of His grace, going into the storm of the cross for you, bearing your guilt and sin, and coming through victorious for you, when the stormy soul beholds that and the weight of sin is lifted from your heart and you hear the Father say over you what He spoke over Jesus, this is my beloved child in whom I am well pleased.

When the Spirit comes and makes you alive to that, to the love of God and the costly grace of God, paying the infinite debt of your sin, oh, when that calm sweeps over the once troubled soul, then real and genuine love begin to flow for God and for neighbor.

[30 : 09] We will begin to love not in fear or anxiety or with a troubled conscience, we just love because He first loved us. And out of love for this God, we delight to keep His commands.

Yes, we'll even strive and pursue holiness out of love. we will raise our sails to the wind, we'll put our oars into the water and pull with all the strength that He provides, strength that comes also by His grace.

So, the true gospel comforts and calms the heart and empowers the heart, but non-gospels simply trouble the heart. The next contrast we see is this.

The true gospel is odious. Yes, odious, offensive, but true gospel is odious to man.

Non-gospels are odious to God. You see, the true gospel tells us, right, that apart from radical grace, we cannot please God.

[31 : 26] and that is a blow to all of our human pride. And in our fallen nature, we don't really like that message. The sinful human heart doesn't really accept its radical sinfulness and its dependence on radical grace in Christ.

That message is odious to us, but by His Spirit, through the word of the gospel itself, through the message of grace, God actually softens our hearts and breaks through our pride.

And what was once odious and offensive to us becomes sweeter and more desirable than anything this world could offer. Through the Spirit's inner working, we see that it's better to be loved by God in His grace and to find acceptance in His infinite favor than to cling to our pride and our self-justification.

So yes, the true gospel is a true gospel of God. non-gospels, they steal God's glory. Because after all, if the deciding factor between my ruin and my rescue is what I do, whether that's my circumcision or any other human work, then ultimately I get the glory because, well, I did it.

And these false gospels ultimately lead God's people into ruin. They don't just diminish God's grace or steal His glory. They lead God's people into ruin because false gospels cannot save, because they point us away from Christ and point us to ourselves.

[33 : 37] And friend, because false gospels are odious to God, that means they should be odious to the church as well.

That's why Paul puts it the way he does in verses 8 through 9. He's telling the churches in Galatia to be discerning and to be decisive when it comes to these non-gospels. It doesn't matter what the source is. Even if Paul himself were to come back preaching a false gospel, a different gospel than the one they received that exalts the grace of Christ, what should they do? Throw him out.

After all, everything's at stake in the gospel. Who God is, who we are, who Christ is and what He's done, the basis of our life and work, the motivation for our love and deeds, the assurance of our eternal future. It's all at stake in the gospel. The gospel isn't just something that unbelievers need to hear.

It's something that believers need to constantly live in and unpack and unfold and rest in every single day of our lives. One more contrast. We've seen that the true gospel exalts grace.

Non-gospels distort grace. We've seen that the true gospel comforts the heart.

Non-gospels trouble the heart. We've seen that the true gospel, yes, is odious to fallen humans, but the non-gospel is odious to God.

[35:12] Last, in verse 10, we see that the true gospel frees us from people-pleasing, whereas non-gospels shackle us to human approval. Look at how Paul ends this kind of introduction to his letter. For 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. Apparently, some of Paul's opponents, including most likely these false teachers at Galatia, accused Paul of being a people-pleaser.

They might have said something like this. You know, this Paul, he preaches a message of nothing but grace. He doesn't think you need to keep the law of Moses to be saved. Do you know why he's doing that? He's doing that so he can win an audience and gain human approval. Paul's gospel is just a people-pleasing gospel. That's what they were accusing Paul of. But what does Paul say here? He says, no, it's actually just the opposite. In his former life as a Pharisee, Paul was obsessed with his own performance. In the next passage of Galatians in verse 14, he says, I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people. So extremely zealous was I for the tradition of my fathers. Did you notice the language of comparison there? Paul says, I was advancing beyond many of my own age.

You see, living in a non-gospel inevitably leads us to comparison and competition. If my works, if my performance is what sets me apart and saves me, then I will inevitably start comparing myself to others to see how well I'm faring. For Paul, it was, am I keeping the law of Moses closely enough? And you know what? He thought he was doing a pretty good job.

But what is it for us? Am I engaging in good works sacrificially enough? Am I being impacted by the Spirit's work enthusiastically or miraculously enough? Am I being the perfect parent or the perfect student or the perfect friend enough? All of this focus on the self then leads to comparison.

How do my good works measure up against him or her? How does my experience of the Spirit compare to him or her? How does my parenting or friendship or work compare to theirs? And when that comparison starts to take hold, then we inevitably become trapped in human-centered approval or disapproval, even if the human whose approval we live for is our own, the own voice in our own heads.

[37:58] Paul says, I don't live that way anymore. He's actually found real interior freedom from human approval and people-pleasing and comparison. Like a bird flying out of a cage into the bright blue sky, he's found the freedom. Where? In Christ. If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. You see, the gospel of grace takes our eyes off of ourselves and off of comparison with other people and puts our eyes solely on Christ and His beauty and His power and His perfection and above all His grace. And when the grace of the gospel reaches us and we're united to Christ by faith, we don't live anymore for what other people think of us, not even for what we ourselves think of us. We care only for what

Christ thinks of us. We don't serve others anymore. We don't serve ourselves. We only serve Him. Our lives are hidden with Him. And friend, if I am a servant of Christ, the King of the ages, the risen Lord, the never-failing friend, the one whose very name is faithful and true, then how could I possibly live anymore as a servant of mere human approval?

You have the favor of the Lord of heaven and earth. His grace rescues you and empowers you every day. That's all that matters. Now, I don't have to live to get the approval of others.

I don't live to get something from other people, you see. No, in Christ, now I can live simply to bless them and do them good. I don't need their approval anymore. And because I don't need them, now I can truly love them. That's the power of the true gospel. It can change the very structures and motivations of your heart. It can change the very direction of your desires. It has the power to truly set you free. Do you know this gospel, the true gospel of God's grace in Christ, the gospel that calms your heart and sets you free? Or are you still flirting with a different gospel that's really no gospel at all? If the Spirit's showing you that this morning, then look at your own heart. Look at your own heart and say with Paul,

I'm astonished you're so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ. Be astonished with Paul, and then run to the arms of your Savior, and let the waves of His grace calm your troubled heart, and let the freedom of His grace lift you up and let you fly. Let's pray together.

[41:29] Lord Jesus, we simply praise You that Your grace has reached even us. Would we live in the peace and in the freedom of peace and in the freedom of that? Help us to have discerning eyes and discerning hearts when the non-gospels that flood our world and even our own minds and hearts come rushing in. Lord, quiet the voices of these false gospels and help us to see again that there's only one, only one, only one gospel, only one Lord.

And in Him, we are loved forever. We pray this in Jesus' mighty name. Amen.