

PAUL AND THE GOSPEL  
GALATIANS 1:6-10

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

John Osteen (PROJECTOR ON--- JOHN OSTEEN) grew up in Texas. He had Southern Baptist roots. He went to a Baptist seminary and went on to pastor Baptist churches. His life then encountered difficulties. He went through a painful divorce, got remarried, and began to rethink his theological convictions.

John Osteen struck out on his own and started an independent church in Houston, which became known as Lakewood Church. Lakewood Church experienced tremendous growth. It grew to include 15,000 members. It developed a television ministry, which was overseen by his son Joel. Then in January of 1999 John suffered a heart attack and died.

Son Joel (JOEL OSTEEN) was tapped to take over leadership of the church and the ministry. He had no theological training, but he proved to be an effective communicator. Attendance continued to grow. The church bought the Compaq Center, which was formerly the home of the Houston Rockets. Attendance grew to as many as 52,000 people attending multiple services in one weekend, making it the largest church in the US. His television ministry has expanded to over one hundred countries.

Joel Osteen also experienced success as a writer. His first book was entitled *Your Best Life Now*. (YOUR BEST LIFE NOW) It reached number one on the New York Times "Self Help Best Seller" list. It has sold eight million copies. The original meaning of the word "gospel" is "good news." The good news in this book is the promise that we can all have a good life now. The thing of interest to us as Christians about this book is that there is no mention of sin, eternal life, salvation, or crucifixion. Jesus is mentioned only two or three times. So what are we to make of this? Is Joel Osteen the face of good news today? Is he an appropriate representative of the message of the Christian church?

We began our study of the New Testament Book of Galatians last week. We looked at the story of the dramatic conversion of the Apostle Paul who wrote this letter. Though he was raised as a devout Jew, the Lord Jesus appeared directly to him and told him to bring the message of the gospel to Gentiles. (FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY) So about ten years later Paul and his friend Barnabas headed out from their home base in Antioch of Syria to undertake an evangelistic mission to the west. They went first to the island of Cyprus. Then they headed north to Asia Minor. They proceeded inland to preach in the larger cities of that area.

(GALATIA 2) Most of these cities were part of the Roman province of Galatia. Hence we get the name "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians." It appears that after Paul and

Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria, news came to them that the Galatian Christians were being exposed to a message about God and Jesus and the Christian life which varied from what they had taught these people.

So we saw last week in the first five verses of Galatians that Paul spoke about grace, which becomes a major theme of the book. In the passage before us this morning he introduces the subject of the gospel. We shall see how that connects with the idea of grace.

I.

In vv. 6 & 7 of #1 we encounter THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL. (I. THE NATURE OF THE GOSPEL) Paul writes, **“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— 7 not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”**

The fascinating thing to us who are familiar with Paul's letters in the New Testament is that he jumps right from his introductory greeting to a rather stern admonition. His normal pattern is to follow an introductory greeting with a word of appreciation and thanksgiving for the Christians on the receiving end of his letters.

If you turn ahead a few pages in your Bible you will come to Philippians. (PHILIPPIANS 1:3) In v. 3 of #1 Paul says, **“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you...”** Philippians is followed in the New Testament by Colossians. (COLOSSIANS 1:3) In v. 3 of #1 Paul writes, **“We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you...”** The book after Colossians is 1 Thessalonians. (1 THESSALONIANS 1:2) In v. 2 of #1 the apostle writes, **“We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers...”** It is generally a good principle to follow to find a reason to encourage people and give thanks for them, especially fellow Christians. But Paul doesn't do that here in Galatians. The impression we get is that he is pretty upset with them.

Why is that so? He says that the Galatians are quickly deserting Him who called them, which would be God the Father. The original word for “deserting” was often used of military deserters. So it is a strong word. It is in the present tense, indicating that it is an ongoing thing. It is not a completed action, but these Christians are listening to a message which is at variance with the message that Paul and Barnabas gave them.

This change is also happening quickly. The situation is that Paul and Barnabas have returned to Antioch after this first missionary trip. Apparently they soon get news that these Galatian Christians are hearing a different message and are starting to believe it.

The message is here called “the gospel.” In the original Greek it is *euangelion*, from which we get our English words “evangelism” and “evangelical.” The word literally

means “good news.” So evangelicals are “good news” people. This gospel has something to do with being rescued from this “present evil age,” as the author said in v. 4. It also relates to Christ giving himself for us, also mentioned in v. 4.

We have a sample of the good news message which Paul presented to the people of Galatia in the Book of Acts. (FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY) Acts #13 describes this first missionary trip. Beginning in v. 16 of that chapter we have a description of the message which Paul gave in the synagogue in Antioch in a part of Galatia known as Pisidia. Paul recites Jewish history familiar to his audience. He talks about parts of the Hebrew Bible describing the coming Messiah. He talks about Jesus’ fulfillment of those prophecies. He emphasizes the story of the resurrection. In order to have a good life now, he addresses the need for dealing with sin.

In vv. 38 & 39 (ACTS 13:38) he declares, **“Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, (ACTS 13:39) and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”** The offer is given to be freed from the penalty of sin and the burden of trying to follow the Old Testament law. The necessary response is simply belief. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Back in our text this gospel message is associated with grace. Grace is often defined as “unmerited favor.” In this book grace is mentioned seven times. Not only is this gospel message, this rescue from an evil age, received without any merit on our part, it is also a result of the calling of God. The reality is that the Galatians were not looking for Jesus. God sought them out through the Apostle Paul. It is also God at work who seeks us out.

But now these Galatians have been presented with another gospel. This gospel is described at the end of v. 6 as “another” gospel. The original word refers to another of a different kind. In v. 7 Paul uses a different word for “another,” which means another of a similar kind. He says that this false gospel is not a gospel of a similar kind.

At Christmas one of my gifts was a Fisher space pen. They are cool writing instruments. It was a gift which I appreciated. But as is typical for me, somewhere along the way I have lost it. My pens tend to fall out of my pocket. Or this pen may be hiding in a pocket of a shirt or a pair of pants that I have just not used in a while. But if someone came along and offered me a Bic pen to replace my Fisher space pen, that would be a pen of a different kind. It is not really in the same prestigious category. If someone offered me another Fisher space pen, that would be a different pen of a similar kind. This is the kind of imagery that Paul is using to describe the gospel in these verses. The real gospel is a message of a different kind from what these outside influencers are presenting.

This different gospel is troubling the Galatian Christians. It is distorting the genuine gospel of Christ. What is this other gospel? That is not immediately obvious. But as we make our way through the book, we can get a pretty good idea about what it involved. In Galatians #5 vv. 2 & 3 we read, **“Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept**

**circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. 3 I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.”**

Who would be telling Christians in Galatia to get circumcised? It would be Jewish people. It would be Jews who became followers of Jesus who told Gentiles that they had to follow the Hebrew Scriptures if they really wanted to be right with God. Indeed we find in the Book of Acts that this was an issue that arose within the early church. At first all of the Christians were Jews. But then in places like Antioch in Syria, Gentiles started to believe in Jesus. So some of the Jewish Christians started saying that these new Gentile Christians needed to start following the Old Testament law to have a completely right relationship with God. The men needed to be circumcised.

The rabbis by the time of Jesus had determined that there 613 basic commandments in the Hebrew Scriptures. By the time of Jesus they had added 341 more commandments which they said were necessary to be observed by good Jews in their daily lives. So these Jewish Christian influencers were saying that the Galatian Christians, especially the Gentiles, had to start following these additional rules. Paul says that this is not the gospel. This is a distortion of the message that salvation comes through faith in Christ as a result of grace.

Paul appears to be pretty upset by this influence of another gospel of a different kind. Why is he so upset? There are at least three reasons. Number **one** is that he was recently in Galatia. He was just there explaining the real gospel. They have been quickly tempted away from it.

**Second**, this other gospel minimizes the sacrifice of Jesus. The real gospel is that Jesus was God who became man. He lived a sinless life. He died a painful death on the cross. He rose again from the dead. This other gospel says that Jesus' sacrifice is not enough. We need something more. It is an insult to Jesus Christ to say that His great sacrifice was not enough to pay the penalty for the sins of humanity.

**Third**, Paul is upset because the stakes are so large. The eternal fate of people is at stake in getting this right. (PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 7:13) Jesus Himself said in Matthew #7 v. 13, **“Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.”** A bit later in Matthew's gospel Jesus explains what this destruction involves. He describes how angelic beings will deal with those who don't buy His message. (MATTHEW 13:50) According to Matthew #13 v. 50 Jesus says that they will **“... throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”** Jesus indicates that most people are headed for this horrible fate. So Paul sees it as crucial that Christians get the gospel message right.

The tendency throughout Christian history is to include add-ons to the gospel. (PROJECTOR OFF) Some of the Jewish Christians wanted to add on the Old Testament law. Seventh Day Adventists want to add on Sabbath observance. You can't be right with God unless you worship and refrain from work on Saturday. Christian

Scientists say that you have to follow the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy. Mormons say that we need to follow the directions of Joseph Smith. Catholics say that we must observe the seven sacraments in order to be right with God.

But even among evangelical Christians with whom most of us might be inclined to identify, there are subtle things that we add to the pure gospel. Some say that you have to walk forward in church. You have to feel sorry for your sins, that you have to have some kind of emotional reaction. You have to make Jesus Lord of your life. You have to be willing to live a holy life. You have to be baptized by immersion. The pure gospel is this: **Believe** in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. For God so loved the world that He gave His unique Son that whoever **believes** in Him should not perish but have eternal life. This is the message of Paul and the apostles.

II.

We come then to vv. 8 & 9 and THE DANGER OF GETTING THE GOSPEL WRONG.  
(PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE DANGER OF GETTING THE GOSPEL WRONG)

According to v. 8, **“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.”** The message is the key thing. Except for Jesus, the presenters of the message are always flawed individuals. They are never perfect.

To stress this idea Paul uses hyperbole to say that even if a heavenly being should show up and present a different gospel, we should not believe him. It is the doctrine which is important. It is not true that all roads lead to heaven. All religions do not teach the same thing. The true gospel says that it is faith in Jesus which is the key.

In our recent study of Philippians we saw that Paul was in prison when he wrote that letter. Apparently there were some Christians who were presenting the gospel with wrong motives. Notice what he says about this situation (PHILIPPIANS 1:15) in Philippians #1 vv. 15-18: **“Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. (PHILIPPIANS 1:16) The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. (PHILIPPIANS 1:17) The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. (PHILIPPIANS 1:18) What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice.”** It is the message which is the main thing.

The teacher who presents the wrong message, Paul says, should be accursed. The original word is *anathema*. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament done before the time of Jesus that word was used to describe God’s judgment. There was a somewhat similar situation described in Deuteronomy #13. A scenario was pictured in which false prophets would lead the people astray from the true God. This is what God said should happen to a city who buys into this wrong message: (DEUTERONOMY 13:15) **“...you shall surely put the inhabitants of that city to the sword, devoting it to destruction--- anathema--- all who are in it and its cattle, with the edge of the sword.”**

Where is the Christian love in this accursed business? (PROJECTOR OFF) Paul does not sound very loving toward these other teachers. I suspect that he would defend himself by saying that he is dealing with matters of truth. There are eternal issues at stake. Will people go to heaven or hell? It is not loving to get the foundational issue wrong. This is a crucial matter about how people get to heaven. If people get it wrong, they will end up in a place of destruction called the lake of fire. So people who lead others astray, who draw them away from a message of grace, are deserving of this curse.

Paul continues in v. 9 of our text: **“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.”** Paul is reinforcing his point with repetition. To lead people astray from the true gospel is a very bad thing. To send people down a path that leads to destruction is to bring a curse from God upon them.

This human tendency to add to the gospel of grace is so often at work. Secondary issues are wrongly made primary issues. The claim is too often made that you have to belong to our Christian group or denomination to be right with God. “We are the one true church.” All of this gets us apart from the simple message of grace. The price has been paid. Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins. We simply have to believe in Him.

There is a wonderful old Christian hymn which stresses the role of grace and our human tendency to stray from it. The hymn is entitled “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing.” This is how that song goes (PROJECTOR ON--- COME THOU FOUND MIDDLE), beginning in the middle of the second stanza:

**Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
wandering from the fold of God;  
he, to rescue me from danger,  
interposed his precious blood. (COME 3RD STANZA)**

**3 O to grace how great a debtor  
daily I’m constrained to be!  
Let that grace now, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to thee. (COME 3RD B)**

**Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love;  
here’s my heart; O take and seal it;  
seal it for thy courts above.**

Such is the grace that we need. Such is our tendency to stray.

III.

We come finally to v. 10 and THE IMPLICATION OF GOSPEL SERVICE. (III. THE IMPLICATION OF GOSPEL SERVICE) Verse 10 reads, **“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.”**

The likely scenario which seems to be envisioned here is that Jewish followers of Jesus came to some or all of these towns where churches had been planted by Paul and Barnabas. They told these young Christians: Paul was right about Jesus. Jesus was the Son of God who became a human being. He died to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. He rose again from the dead. All of this was in fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures.

But Paul didn't tell quite the whole story. He was sent out by the church in Antioch. But we represent the tradition of Jesus and the first apostles. Paul was telling you Gentiles the easy part of the gospel. He was trying to win your approval. But the complete story is that if you want to be fully right with God, you have to follow the law of God as we Jews have observed it for centuries. You men need to be circumcised. All of you need to observe the Sabbath. You need to observe the other feast days. You have to follow the dietary restrictions. You can't eat pork. You need to go to the synagogue.

Perhaps these Jewish followers of Jesus had heard about a statement Paul made which he later recorded in 1 Corinthians. (1 CORINTHIANS 9:22) In #9 v. 22 he wrote, **“To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”** You see, these false teachers might have said, Paul is telling you Gentiles what you want to hear. But he is not telling you the whole gospel.

Paul is responding: “These false teachers have it all wrong. (PROJECTOR OFF) I am not seeking the approval of men. I am following the commission Jesus gave me. He is the one who commissioned me for this mission. It was not a church or any of the other apostles. I was happy and popular when I was doing my Jewish life. The religious Jews all loved me. It is when I started promoting Jesus and going out to the Gentiles when life became challenging. I have been beaten and stoned by Jews and Gentiles for doing this evangelism deal. If I was trying to please people, I would not put up with all of this persecution. All of this tough experience shows that I am in reality the servant of Christ.” The word which Paul uses is the word for a common slave.

So it was Paul's message which was the real deal. It was a message of grace. He was raised in the message of works. He was earlier convinced that the way to win God's approval was by following the 613 commandments of the Old Testament and the additional rules which the rabbis had developed. Those Jews who started to follow Jesus were a threat to everything Jewish and needed to be eliminated.

When Jesus appeared to Paul and called this Jewish leader to follow Him, it was a total grace thing. Paul had not earned the approval of God the Father and His Son. He had been an enemy of Jesus. Yet Paul discovered that his sins were forgiven and that he

had eternal life simply by believing in Jesus. So it was the response to that grace and that call that now became the driving force for his life. And it is the understanding of this message of grace which should drive us. The implication of gospel service is that we should see ourselves as servants of Christ.

In contrast to Pastor Joel, Pastor John was not an especially smooth speaker. He lived in New England in the 1700s. One Sunday he was invited on short notice to be the guest preacher at a Congregational church in Enfield, Connecticut. We have a copy of the manuscript of that sermon. It was 8000 words long. My sermons tend to be a little over 4000 words long. So his sermon was probably almost an hour long.

He spoke at this Enfield church in July. They didn't have any air conditioning. So it was probably hot. Some church historians claim that Pastor John was near sighted and tended to read his sermons. Some say that he often spoke in a monotone. Then also we are told that most of the people in this congregation were skeptical about the conservative theology which this pastor promoted,

Unlike Pastor Joel this pastor did not focus on having one's best life now. He focused on sin and damnation. His primary text was Deuteronomy #32 v. 35, which says, **"Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly."**

At one point in this long sermon he declared, **"That world of misery, that lake of burning brimstone, is extended abroad under you. There is the dreadful pit of the glowing flames of the wrath of God; there is hell's wide gaping mouth open; and you have nothing to stand upon, nor anything between you and hell but the air; it is only the power and mere pleasure of God that holds you up."** He also adds, **"You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of Divine wrath flashing about it, and ready every moment to singe it and burn it asunder. . . ."** That is a cruel thing to tell people, unless it is true.

Toward the end of his message Pastor John speaks about the gospel of grace. He says that this is **"a Day wherein Christ has flung the Door of Mercy wide open."** Forgiveness of sins and rescue from this horrible eternal fate is available simply by trusting in Jesus. Contemporary accounts indicate that in spite of some of the adverse conditions people in his audience responded by falling down, weeping, and crying out for God to save them. Clearly the Holy Spirit used a Biblical message to bring conviction of sin and a need for salvation.

This pastor's full name is Jonathan Edwards. (PROJECTOR ON--- JONATHAN EDWARDS). His sermon became perhaps the best known sermon in American church history. It was entitled "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." Its delivery in that church led to a revival in that Connecticut town. It was part of a larger New England revival, in which Jonathan Edwards played a key part, and which became known as the Great Awakening. Central to this revival was this message of grace. It was the true gospel. But it was also a message which dealt with the reality of sin and future eternal



damnation. It was the message which the Apostle Paul regarded as so vital in his day. It is the message which is essential to our day. We need to keep it straight. For there are so many forces in our day that want to distort it and add on to it.

But here it is: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved.