

## ***No other gospel*** (Galatians 1:6–9)

The unique start of Paul's letter to the Galatians, the absence of any word of praise or thanksgiving, focuses the reader on the seriousness of the situation in Galatia, that the believers were deserting God for a distorted message, a non-gospel. The ever-present attack against the gospel makes this letter constantly relevant and important, because the gospel is at the heart of Christianity. Get the gospel wrong, and you are not truly a Christian. The apostle Paul understood this and was appalled at the situation in the Galatian churches. We can see by Paul's response in this forceful opening to the letter, how serious the situation was.

### **I. *Paul's astonishment shows the seriousness of the situation.***

#### **1. *Paul was astonished that they would desert God.***

God had called them in the grace of Christ. He had drawn them and brought them to accept the free gift (grace) of forgiveness and a right standing before Him through the person and work of Jesus Christ as proclaimed in the gospel.

Therefore, moving from that gospel to a false gospel was deserting God. Distorting the gospel is deserting God. Without Christ, people are enemies of God (Romans 5:10; Colossians 1:21). When the good news of the gift of eternal life is not received by faith alone, that person remains an enemy of God. If they know the true message, they are like deserters. Thankfully, the Galatians were not yet there, but were only heading there. So Paul warns them strongly not to accept any false gospel.

#### **2. *Paul was astonished that they would depart from the gospel of grace so quickly or readily.***

Perhaps the false teachers alleged some authority from Jerusalem (cf. 2:12; Acts 15:1), giving some push to accept their message. Whatever the reason, a quick departure is astonishing and dangerous considering their initial experience of having heard directly from Paul, having had the message confirmed with miracles (Acts 14:3), and having been filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52).

#### **3. *Paul was astonished that they would turn to a non-gospel.***

The new message which the Galatians were hearing was not a true gospel; it was another message of a different kind. It was not truly the good news as Paul had proclaimed, for example, in Pisidian Antioch: the death and resurrection of Christ, forgiveness of sin in Christ, and the grace of God (Acts 13:32–43). Grace is key; it means that salvation is a gift, not merited or earned, and received by faith alone.

### **II. *Paul's warning about the false teachers shows the seriousness of the situation.***

#### **1. *Paul's opponents were "troubling the church".***

Although "trouble" can have the subjective sense of inward turmoil, the objective sense of being shaken is probably more in view. Change the message and you shake the church to its foundations. A similar metaphor in Ephesians 4:14 describes the untrained as "tossed to and fro ... by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes." Deceit hides the departure from the revealed truth of the gospel, but its effects are evident.

#### **2. *Clearly these "trouble makers" in the Galatian churches were "wishing to distort the gospel."***

Distort the gospel and a church will be shaken. These trouble makers wanted to change the gospel into something contrary to it. But by changing it, they made it a non-gospel. As the gospel of Jesus Christ, none have the right to change it and those who try to add works to the gospel demean Christ, picturing Him and His death as less than sufficient.

### **III. *Paul's calling upon God to curse such false teachers shows the seriousness of the situation.***

#### **1. Anyone who changes the gospel should, Paul emphatically declares, "be accursed" – *anathema*, that is, devoted to God for destruction (cf. Numbers 21:3).**

#### **2. God's standard for judging the message is the biblical revelation of the gospel.**

Paul had preached a gospel message directly revealed by God (1:11–12), which the Galatians had received. That message was the standard to judge all preaching, regardless of the preacher, whether man or angel.

#### **3. Particularly dangerous are false gospels not blatantly in opposition to the true gospel.**

As the word choice here implies, this "contrary" gospel fell short of or went just beyond the true gospel. It became contrary to the true gospel by demanding more than the gospel demanded.

It is a serious matter. The gospel we believe and proclaim must truly be good news, a message of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Believe rightly for your own salvation. Discern rightly to guard yourself and others from distorted messages. Proclaim the true gospel to avoid God's judgment and to offer a true way of salvation to others.

#### ***Questions for review, thought and discussion:***

- What does the word "gospel" mean? What does "grace" mean? Why is "faith alone" necessary for the gospel to be purely by God's grace?
- Paul's exclamation, "let him be accursed", could sound extremely harsh. Why is it appropriate?
- Have you heard a "distorted" gospel? What made it distorted?
- How do you increase your ability to discern the true gospel from distorted claims?