

“Turning Away” ...from the true gospel. - PART 2 -

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Galatians 1:6 *I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble*

you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. 9 As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. 10 For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a bondservant of Christ. 11 But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. 12 For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. 14 And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers.

VS 6-7: After what was an uncharacteristically short greeting from the apostle Paul, the gloves came off.

“I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.”

There are two things, I believe, to emphasize in order to fully understand the impact of this letter, and that is that this is written to people who were ‘church going confessing believers,’ and were deliberately misled for the benefit of those doing the lying. The people in those churches weren’t worldly pagans and this is not meant to be an evangelistic outreach. They were “Christians,” *at least in profession*. But they had apparently begun to attempt to accept a *different* gospel, and the point Paul is driving home throughout this letter is that there is no such thing as a “different” gospel! Paul was going to clarify that only a trust in Christ renders a person truly saved since only *His* gospel indeed redeems.

Its not as if these folks had been sold a bill of goods, or that Paul had practiced a “bait and switch.” After all, they *had* the real thing in the beginning! They were taught the righteous gospel and had been given the true Word of God. But just like now, some of these folks had become distracted by the world and sought a more fleshly pleasing version of Christianity. One that no doubt allowed for “special dispensations” and “situational allowances” for actions that were contrary to scriptural instruction. This was a clear case of wanting to “have their cake and eat it too.”

Indeed, we have to admit that the Gospel of Jesus Christ can be difficult to embrace. It’s not logical and reasonable to our flesh, for it flies in the face of the “can do” spirit that lies innately in each one of us, especially to those of us in America. It goes against our childhood programming that a person ‘gets what they deserve.’ The human philosophies of law and justice are thrown out, and it scrambles our senses. After all, no one

naturally loves the unlovable! No one ordinarily loves an evil person! But God does! He loves us enough to have allowed His only Son to die for us, *while we were still sinners, still lost, still in rebellion to Him*. Perhaps that is why we readily receive this redemption...like inexplicably winning the lottery, and also why we will so easily slip away from it and back to our feeble attempts to “rewrite Beethoven” and edit van Gogh. Because many of us come to Christ to merely better our lives, not give them up to Him for use.

Paul asks the hard-hitting and implicit question: *what’s wrong with you guys?* They, like so many of us, began with the understanding of their chronic and terminal state of being, and ran to the only answer out there: Jesus Christ. But then later, once redeemed, they felt...*we felt*...that they should or better yet **could**, add something to what was already complete and perfect. One false premise that seems to perpetuate that action, is that we tend to see the gospel salvation as an “event” rather than a journey and a lifestyle.

In 1 Corinthians 15:2, Paul uses the present tense of the word “saved” and thus it is really “*being saved*” and many scripture versions renders it that way (ISV, ESV, NRS, etc) (“*Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*” ESV) Paul describes those who have received the gospel as “being saved” if they hold firmly to the truth as he preached it to them. The problem however is that the word “if” is easily interpreted as “since,” because this statement is tied to them holding fast to the word preached to them. But the context is not so much speaking in terms of the security of one’s salvation (a.k.a “if you hold fast”...meaning I have to do something to stay saved) as much as if they accepted and stood unmovable to the *authentic gospel that Paul delivered to them*. Thus the Corinthians have believed the gospel in vain if they **did not** and **are not** believing the gospel as he preached it to them. In other words, if anyone is believing a false version of the gospel of Jesus, that person should not think that they have any standing before God.

Moreover, those in Christ *have been saved*, in the sense that our sins are forgiven and our place in eternity is secure. *We are being saved*; God is active right now in sanctifying us to be like Christ. *We will be saved* when the moment comes for us to stand before God in eternity, and we're freed from all sin. Thus the gospel is more than just an *event*. It is an all-encompassing transformational living. God did and still does all the lifting, but we must not ever believe or act upon any other truth than that one. If we try to earn it or add to it, it is not the true gospel.

The truth is, when it comes to salvation, I am only a fan. I can hum a few bars, but He is the star of the show, and I couldn’t write that stuff if my life depended on it. Make no mistake today: there are those out there that want to mess with your head. “Misery loves company” and so in a great way they need you! They need you to join them in order to make themselves feel they are on the right path, to justify their actions, and to make righteous their philosophies. The troublemakers for Paul were seeking recruits for their legalism and their attacks on him. But Paul was not standing back and having either. Their methods haven’t really changed much through the years. They will send you cloaked emails and offer subtle innuendos against your church and its leadership when they run into you in Wal-Mart. They need you to join them in their subterfuge in order to ease their cancerous conscience that keeps convicting them of their sin.

This is why we as Christians must never forget we are at war. We can ill afford to begin to live in a spiritual land of butterflies and rainbows where everything is sugarplums and glitter. People are evil. The world is evil. We are saved by God’s inexplicable grace, we stay saved by God’s inexplicable grace, and we exist in God’s inexplicable grace!

This is why when we actually live for Christ, we glorify Christ. Because we are *not that* in our natural state! We have nothing to offer that will better His grace. He does not exist to glorify *us*, to make us humanly righteous and good. We play His symphony of salvation because we love His music and we desire to honor the composer.

Here are some of the lies you will hear:

They will tell you that salvation brings us implicit and constant happiness, and if it's tough, if it's hard, then you are not where you should be. They will entreat you to come out of your loving service to the Lord because feeling good, an easy life, is what you deserve as a righteous redeemed. They will tell you that you need only listen to His song on the radio and live your life. But what *you* want is to attend His concerts and play His music! They will tell you that you are a good person and that you should write your own music. That God's symphony was just an example for you to follow in writing your own path, your own faith, your own creation.

And they will always despise the conductor! "*Do your own thing, freelance, adlib!*" It's the jazz philosophy of Christianity. But a symphony is meant to be played together in unison, each playing their part to make beautiful music as a beautiful honor to the author. That author is no one else but Jesus.

VS 8-9: Paul answers such ideas with the most serious of judgments: "*let them be accursed.*" If anyone tries to lay this kind of trip on you, let them be damned. Those are the stakes that are on the table here. This is serious stuff. We dare not move away from the truth, the very foundation of our salvation.

There will be many people who will come and tell you things that may seem very spiritual, very reasonable. But is it what the Bible says? Is it what God has said? One sure tell in this matter, is that their plan always seems to involve our "feelings" not the facts. Such ideas *can have* and *have had* people presumably in the name of God: barking like dogs, laughing like hyenas, falling on the floor and convulsing 'in the spirit,' seeking earthly riches, drinking poison kool-aid, waiting on the mothership, selling everything they have for the humanly given stated day of the rapture, condemning your church, hating your brethren, quitting the band to "go solo."

Paul's language is pretty tough here. I bet a lot of folks thought he was really mean. Or did Paul just clearly understand what was at stake?

Jon Courson said:

"Whenever there is a phenomenon or an expression of the Spirit, if, like Peter on the Day of Pentecost, you can say, 'This is that spoken by the Word' (see Acts 2:16), you will have a solid and stable walk. A good rule of thumb concerning any practice or tradition is this: Where do you see it in the life of Jesus? Secondly, does it continue through the Book of Acts? Finally, is it taught by Paul in the Epistles?" (Courson)

VS 10: In verse 10 of chapter one, Paul begins the longest autobiographical passage we have concerning him.

It is obvious the pain that his attackers had caused him, as well as the alarm and, no doubt, even discouragement that had come from knowing that the people to whom he ministered were being sucked up by some guys peddling lies and false doctrine. Paul was one man in a long stream of pastors who have experienced such backlash and discouragement. It comes with the territory, and there really seems to be no avoiding it unless the pastor is just openly avoiding his responsibilities and frankly ignoring the gospel.

The people in Galatia, as well as many such groups and churches since then, have fallen victim to something known as "syncretism." Syncretism is a term which describes a melding of "varying, often mutually opposed beliefs, principles, or practices, esp. those of various religions, into a new conglomerate whole typically marked by internal inconsistencies." Meaning they have taken their core beliefs and mixed them into a hybrid with other contrary beliefs, then presented it as faithful and consistent when obviously it is anything but that. It's a

common slide for people who are not alert and self-evaluating, especially if you are incapable or unwilling to acknowledge real truth and personal sin.

Paul begins by saying, “May I remind you that the gospel is not just something I made up because it was culturally relevant or personally convenient.” Paul was standing on Scripture. That was his final word. It wasn’t feelings, situational ethics, or a man-pleasing stance. It was the gospel, plain and simple.

Notice that these folks who were causing problems didn’t come to Paul to discuss their issues. Oh, no! They were like all those who followed! They went after the weak ones, the new believers, and those without a committed foundation. They waited until Paul was nowhere around and then they made their move. And they did so with sly innuendos and religious overtones. It’s been that way since Satan in the garden asked, “*Did God really say...?*”

Paul is asking in a rhetorical fashion, “Am I just a people pleaser? Do I just minister to please men?” He acknowledges the obvious: if he did, then he would not be a true minister; he would not be a real servant Christ. Paul preached the gospel as it was presented in the Bible. This is where men began to say he was extreme or too easy, that he was too mean or that he was too soft. It all depended upon whose sieve it was run through. Paul was saying that he simply preached the simple gospel, and let the “chips fall where they may.”

VS11-12: It seems that every other religion has in it the philosophies of men speculating about God. Yet biblical Christianity declares that God has clearly revealed Himself to us so that we know who He is quite clearly. Paul was not going to bend on this matter. He was ready, as every good pastor is, to see the doors of the church closed and his ministry end before he would back down from what he saw as an unmovable position.

He knew that what they were fighting was ultimately not him or even his doctrine! But it was Christ, what Christ was doing, and what Christ had taught. Their battle was with Jesus. Paul wasn’t trying to avoid the heat or shift the responsibility. But he was saying, “*If you don’t hear what I am telling you, your issue is with Christ, not me.*”

And the bottom line, as he says more clearly later, is that he had the ministerial fruit to prove his righteous stance. The troublemakers couldn’t argue with that. They will attack the nebulous and make innuendos. They will cast doubts on your character and criticize your methods. But when it is all said and done, they can’t argue with your fruit, and it is *that* which the Bible says is the true reflection of a man.

Are people saved and lives changed? Because only God can save a man, and only the true gospel and the Holy Spirit can change a man! Are people disciplined and are they growing? Is God equipping? Is God using you? Are people loved? Is the church obedient and growing? Are the fruits of the spirit evident? How do you fake that?

Paul was saying, “Look, I don’t know everything that men are out there saying. They might do and say anything, but I know what God is saying and that is what I am preaching. Sometimes that may be pleasing to your ears, and sometimes it may burn your ears, but it’s God Word either way. And you know it to be a fact.” Believe me, if there were those who could say *we* weren’t true to the Word of God, they would. But they don’t. Because they can’t. Paul was standing on similar “solid ground.” Paul was saying, “Bring it on, boys.” Paul was seemingly a loving and gentle soul. But on this issue, he was ready to fight. Some things are worth fighting for, and frankly, some things are simply non-negotiable.

VS 13-14: Paul was no stranger to grace. He was hardly a novice! He knew what grace was, for he experienced it graphically and first hand. He didn't hide his past. He didn't present it as some sort of "credibility badge," but he did lay it out there as evidence of the incredible and all-providing grace given by God to any man or woman willing to embrace it. His position was, "Been there, done that."

What the Judaizers, *the legal religious zealots of their day*, had forgotten was that Paul had forgotten more about hardcore Judaism than his accusers would ever even know in the first place. Before he came to Christ, he was "the man." He had it all goin' on. He had been the poster boy for the old-fashioned mosaic religious position. He had effectively "burned and pillaged" in the name of God and believed the whole time that he had the unction of God to do it all. So Paul's position was not taken out of ignorance of the law or ignorance of the religious position of the Judaizers. He knew it well, for he had lived it. In fact, he had actually led the charge.

But it wasn't men who jerked him up short. It wasn't a posse of disciples that caught him in an alley somewhere and beat it out of him. It wasn't anything on the earthly realm because, frankly, he was too far gone for anything short of a meeting with God to get his attention. (Can you relate?) Paul wasn't just saved out of the world; he was saved out of religion. That's a revival we could use right here in middle America!

Paul had been part of something, that at the time, seemed normal and proper. It was a religion of faith and custom, ripe with accepted human traditions that had been superimposed upon it in the distant past. The result was a religious world that was thought to be normal, to be the standard, despite the fact it had dramatically drifted from what was originally given and intended. But no one remembered. No one recognized the dichotomy. They all just followed the status quo. It was an extreme case of, "That's the way it's always been."

Indeed "change for the sake of change only" was not the answer either. That's where we have gotten all sorts of cultic and apostate movements. Attempts to "hip up" the church have proven to be just as disastrous as clinging to our past traditions. Paul knew the truth, and had come to it "the hard way"...face down in the dirt on that road to Damascus. Must we learn truth the same way?