

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON SIX)

“THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST”

GALATIANS 1:6-7

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel—

7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.

The **theme** of Paul’s letter to the believers in Galatia is salvation by grace, received through faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, apart from works.

The **purpose** of the letter was three-fold. Firstly, to emphasize that justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in the righteousness of Christ alone, is the heart of the Gospel. Secondly, to exhort the believers to prove the reality of their spirituality, not by endeavouring to keep the Law, but by allowing the Holy Spirit to control their lives. Thirdly, to counteract the message of the **Judaizers** by showing that it was a false gospel.

The writing of the letter was occasioned by the subtle and deceitful influence that was being exerted on the Galatian believers by the false doctrine of the **Judaizers**. The **Judaizers** were arguing that to be truly saved, a person who professed faith in Christ also had to submit to circumcision and keep the Law of Moses. This was the heresy that the Jerusalem Council addressed in **Acts 15**.

In **Galatians 1:6-7**, Paul expresses astonishment at the suddenness of the defection on the part of the Galatian believers from the Gospel of Christ to a “*different*” (**heteros**) gospel which he says is not “*another*” (**allos**) gospel of the same kind that he preaches. His point is that this “*different*” gospel is not a gospel at all!

The pernicious, legalistic, false gospel of the **Judaizers** was having the effect of “*disturbing*” the Galatian believers. The Greek word translated “*disturbing*” is **tarassó: (tar-as’-so)**, which means, “to agitate, trouble; to stir up; to render anxious or distressed, to perplex the mind of one by suggesting scruples or doubts.” The word conveys the idea of disturbing mentally or of causing deep emotional distress, and thus refers to an unsettled mind. It carries with it the idea of perplexity, confusion, and unrest.

Paul tells us that it was the intent of the false teachers to “*distort*” the Gospel. The Greek word translated “*distort*” is **metastrephó: (met-as-tref’-o)**, which means, “to turn about, turn around, reverse; to pervert, corrupt.” The idea is to turn something to its opposite state, thus altering it and causing it to be different. The purpose of the **Judaizers** was to so change the Gospel of grace which Paul preached, that it would be the reverse of what it was. Instead of a message of a salvation offered free in answer to **faith**, it would be a message of salvation by **works**.

Paul was anxious for his beloved converts in Galatia. They were going through great mental and spiritual agitation because of the false doctrine that had been introduced into the churches. Grace always leads to peace, but the believers had deserted grace and therefore had no peace in their hearts and minds.

Brothers and sisters, whenever we abandon the authentic Gospel for a “*different*” (**heteros**) gospel, which is in reality, not “*another*” (**allos**) gospel of the same kind, we lose our assurance of salvation.

But what is the **Authentic Gospel**? We will try to answer that question in this Lesson.

Article 9 in the Statement of Faith of “**Sovereign Grace Churches,**” defines the Gospel as follows:

“The gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and all that he did in his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to accomplish salvation for humanity. Therefore, the gospel is not a human action or achievement but rather an objective, historical, divine achievement that remains true and unchanging regardless of human opinion or response. The gospel stands as the core message of the Bible, which in all its parts testifies to God’s saving acts culminating in the person and work of Christ. This good news is the power of God for salvation for all who believe, providing hope for the lost and abiding comfort and strength for the believer. There is no salvation apart from Jesus Christ, for there is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved.”

The word “Gospel” is a translation of the Greek word **euaggelion**: (**yoo-ang-ghel’-ee-on**), which literally means “good news.” In secular Greek it originally referred to a reward for good news and later became the good news itself. The word **euaggelion** was commonly used in the first century in the same way that our words “good news” are used today. The idea then and now is something like this - “Have you any good news (**euaggelion**) for me today?” This was a common question in the ancient world. **Euaggelion** is also the word from which we get our English words “evangelist,” and “evangelical.”

The central truth of the Gospel is that God has provided a way of salvation for men through the gift of His son to the world. He suffered as a sacrifice for sin, overcame death, and now offers a share in His triumph to all who will accept it. The Gospel is good news because it is a gift of God, not something that we have to merit or earn.

In **1 Corinthians 15:1-8**, Paul summarizes the most basic ingredients of the Gospel message, namely, the **death, burial, resurrection,** and

appearances of the resurrected Christ. The **New English Translation** renders the passage as follows:

1 Now I want to make clear for you, brothers and sisters, the gospel that I preached to you, that you received and on which you stand,

2 and by which you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

3 For I passed on to you as of first importance what I also received—that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,

4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures,

5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.

6 Then he appeared to more than 500 of the brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

8 Last of all, as though to one born at the wrong time, he appeared to me also.

The four clauses introduced by the word “*that*” in verses **3-5** contain the vital elements of the Gospel. ***That Christ died for our sins,that he was buried,that he was raised,and that he appeared.***

These verses give us the heart of the Gospel and show that the resurrection is an integral part of the Gospel message. In verse **3** Paul says that these elements are “*of first importance.*” He is emphasizing the centrality of these truths to the Gospel message.

The central ingredient of the Gospel message is a two-fold confession. Firstly, that Christ **died** for our sins and secondly, that He was **raised** on the third day. The other two elements—His **burial** and His post-

resurrection **appearances**-accomplish two important facts regarding the Gospel. The fact that He was buried verifies His death, and the fact that He appeared to others after His death verifies His resurrection.

In the New Testament, the word “Gospel” is often modified by terms which focus attention on a particular aspect of the Gospel. We will consider four of these modifying terms.

“**The Gospel of Jesus Christ**” (Mark 1:1; 1 Corinthians 9:12) and “**The Gospel of His Son**” (Romans 1:9). These two descriptions speak of the good news of salvation that comes through the person and work of Jesus Christ who is the Son of God in human form. This is a good news of deliverance from sin’s penalty, power and presence.

“**The Gospel of the Grace of God**” (Acts 20:24). This description emphasizes that salvation in all of its aspects is on the basis of grace rather than on some meritorious system of works.

“**The gospel of the Kingdom**” (Matthew 4:23; 9:35; 24:14). This refers to the good news that God will one day establish His kingdom on the earth at the time of the second advent of the Lord Jesus Christ.

“**The Gospel of Peace**” (Ephesians 6:15). This describes how the good news of salvation in Christ brings peace in all its aspects (peace **with** God, the peace **of** God, peace with ourselves, peace with others, and ultimately world peace), through the atonement accomplished by Christ.

We have a tendency to limit the Gospel to the message of how a person may receive eternal life through faith in Christ, but the message of the Gospel is much broader than that. For example, In **Romans 1:16-17** Paul writes,

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is God’s power for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel from faith to faith, just as it is written, "The righteous by faith will live."
(**New English Translation**)

By using the term "*Gospel*" here, Paul is not limiting the message to the central truths that a person must believe in order to receive eternal life. For Paul, the Gospel includes such matters as justification by faith (**Romans 3-5**), sanctification through the Holy Spirit (**Romans 6-8**), God's future for Israel (**Romans 9-11**), and the implications of the Gospel lived out (**Romans 12-16**). In fact, the Gospel gathers together all the truths that are found in **Romans** and the other epistles into one message.

In **Romans 16:25**, Paul clearly indicates that the ongoing sanctification of believers is a part of the Gospel message. He writes, "*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that had been kept secret for long ages*" (**New English Translation**).

Remember that in **1 Corinthians 15:2**, Paul spoke of the Gospel as that by which the believers in Corinth were, "*being saved*." Clearly, Paul's use of the term "Gospel" is much broader than the majority of persons seem to understand it!

One of the important issues about the message of the Gospel has to do with how one receives the salvation offered in the Gospel. Even a cursory reading of the New Testament will make it incandescently clear that the only way that one receives the salvation that is offered in the Gospel is by faith in Christ Jesus!

The fact that God offers us salvation as a free gift through faith in Christ is extremely good news. Paul clearly links the Gospel with faith in **Galatians 3:6-9**. The **New English Translation** renders the passage in the following way:

6 Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,

7 so then, understand that those who believe are the sons of Abraham.

8 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel to Abraham ahead of time, saying, "All the nations will be blessed in you."

9 So then those who believe are blessed along with Abraham the believer.

If the salvation offered to us by God through the Gospel were dependent on our merit or our ability to keep the law or otherwise perform, it would be **bad** news instead of **good** news, because our inherent sinfulness, or **radical corruption** would result in a complete inability on our part to keep the law or to perform any work of righteousness which would recommend us to God. Paul speaks of this in **Romans 3: 9-20**:

9 What then? Are we better off? Certainly not, for we have already charged that Jews and Greeks alike are all under sin,

10 just as it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one,

11 there is no one who understands, there is no one who seeks God.

12 All have turned away, together they have become worthless; there is no one who shows kindness, not even one."

13 "Their throats are open graves, they deceive with their tongues, the poison of asps is under their lips."

14 "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

15 "Their feet are swift to shed blood,

16 ruin and misery are in their paths,

17 and the way of peace they have not known.”

18 “There is no fear of God before their eyes.”

19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

20 For no one is declared righteous before him by the works of the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin.

(New English Translation)

These verses convey the bad news! Verses **21-24** convey the good news:

21 But now apart from the law the righteousness of God (although it is attested by the law and the prophets) has been disclosed—

22 namely, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction,

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

24 But they are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

(New English Translation)

Why is this element of grace such wonderful news? Because it guarantees the believing sinner justification on the basis of the finished work and merit of Jesus Christ alone. Paul make this very plain in **Romans 4:13-16:**

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not fulfilled through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

14 For if they become heirs by the law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified.

15 For the law brings wrath, because where there is no law there is no transgression either.

16 For this reason it is by faith so that it may be by grace, with the result that the promise may be certain to all the descendants—not only to those who are under the law, but also to those who have the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

(New English Translation)

Brothers and sisters, the aspect of the message of salvation that makes it such good news is the element of grace! Salvation is the free gift of God's grace to be received by faith alone in Christ alone. However, the message of grace is abhorrent to the fallen, unregenerate, adamic nature, or the flesh which instinctively and relentlessly seeks self-glorification rather than the glory of God. The flesh thinks in terms of merit and deserving. Human beings have always had a problem with a grace based salvation and they always will.

From the very early days of the church, it has faced the problem of those who wanted to add some form of works to the message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, for the glory of God alone. In **Acts 15:1-5** we see an example of the opposition that the Gospel of the Grace of God has always faced:

1 Now some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.”

2 When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement.

3 So they were sent on their way by the church, and as they passed through both Phoenicia and Samaria, they were relating at length the conversion of the Gentiles and bringing great joy to all the brothers.

4 When they arrived in Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders, and they reported all the things God had done with them.

5 But some from the religious party of the Pharisees who had believed stood up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise the Gentiles and to order them to observe the law of Moses.”

(New English Translation)

In almost all of his letters Paul warned his readers to beware of those who proclaimed a gospel of salvation by works rather than a gospel of salvation by grace. Whenever someone proclaims a gospel of works, it is not the authentic Gospel. If it rejects the truth that all that God does for us in Christ is by grace alone through faith apart from works, it is a different gospel, which is in fact, no gospel at all!

We will end our study this evening by reading Paul’s clear exposition on how the salvation offered to us by God through the Gospel is to be appropriated by us. In **Romans 10:5-13** we read the following:

5 For Moses writes about the righteousness that is by the law: “The one who does these things will live by them.”

6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart “Who will ascend into heaven?”” (that is, to bring Christ down)

7 or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).

8 But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we preach),

9 because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

10 For with the heart one believes and thus has righteousness and with the mouth one confesses and thus has salvation.

11 For the scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

12 For there is no distinction between the Jew and the Greek, for the same Lord is Lord of all, who richly blesses all who call on him.

13 For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
(New English Translation)