



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 1: 6-10

Spring 2021

"Counterfeit"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning. We are continuing the study that we began last week in the Book of Galatians. We looked at the first five verses and now we're going to look at the next five verses, verses 6 through 10. Galatians chapter 1,

⁶ I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; ⁷ which is *really* not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! ⁹ As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, *(I think what Paul is doing here is he's addressing an accusation that these false teachers made about him. They've undercut his Gospel, (they've given a different gospel), and here he's addressing the accusation that they made that 'he's not really an apostle; he doesn't really have authority. He's really a man who flatters people for his own advantage'. Now this isn't brought out specifically in the text, but I will develop it a little later in the lesson itself. And so he says...)*, ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.

Galatians 1:6-10

May the Lord bless the reading of His Word and bless our time together in it.

(Message) Parents, and with rare exceptions this is true, parents are protective of their children. It is unnatural for a father or mother to abandon their children. It's normal for parents to guard their children. Good parents will even take unpopular steps to save their child from bad company and foolish behavior—like a lion protecting her cubs.

The Apostle Paul was like that with the church. In fact, St. Augustine called him, “the great lion of God”. And to understand his words in our passage, we must see Paul in that role—the role of a parent rescuing his spiritual children from grave danger—like a mother lion protecting her cubs.

That explains the tone of the entire Book of Galatians, which the conservative scholar and apologist, J. Gresham Machen called, “A polemic, a fighting epistle from beginning to end.” And from the start, after Paul gives a brief greeting to the churches, he comes out swinging.

It was his custom to give a word of thanks. We see that in the majority of his letters, to give a word of thanks to his readers after he gives a salutation—a greeting. But instead of giving thanks, Paul states his surprise and his disappointment in the Galatians. He had grounded these churches in the Gospel of grace, only to learn shortly after he had left the churches, after he'd left Galatia in his first missionary journey, that they had begun moving away from the Gospel, and towards Judaism.

And so rather than begin as was customary, "I thank my God and all my remembrance of you", Paul writes, "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you..." (vs6). His words here are sharp and his feelings are strong because the situation was that serious. The Gospel was at stake—and they were deserting it! So there was no reason for thanksgiving, only for expressing shock at what was happening. They were, ‘...deserting Him who had called them by the grace of Christ...’ (vs6).

‘Called by grace’—that is the essence of the Gospel. Salvation is a free gift received through faith alone. We are called to it. We don't earn it. We can't earn it. God doesn't require that we first ‘perform’ in order to gain His favor. He invites sinners, who don't deserve His blessing, to come and have it—have the blessing that He offers. He “called” these Galatians to receive eternal life.

There's a parable that illustrates this. It's the parable of the dinner, found in Luke 14, about a man, a wealthy man, who gave a great banquet. But none of the original guests came. They all had excuses for not attending. So the master sent his servants out into the streets and lanes of the city to bring in the poor and crippled and blind and lame. But even that wasn't enough. So then he sent them “into the highways and along the hedges” to find even more and compel them to come “...so that”, he said, “my house may be filled.” (Luke 14:23). That's the Gospel. God gives men, the poor, the blind, the lame, those without anything, who having nothing to offer God are nevertheless given His invitation to come into His house.

And the Galatians responded to that invitation when Paul and Barnabas visited them. In Acts 13 Luke gives us the story how they first went to the synagogue and preached. And that was Paul's pattern; the Gospel is to the Jew first and then to the Gentile. And so they would go to the synagogues, and they would preach there first. And he did that. But when the Jews rejected the Gospel, Paul said, “...behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” (Luke 13:46). And Luke wrote, “When the Gentiles heard this, they *began* rejoicing and glorifying the word of the LORD; and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” (vs48). It was amazing grace and it was an amazing response. And Paul had witnessed that over Galatia. The original guests, the Jews, wouldn't come to the banquet. So they called “the blind and the lame” Gentiles and they came, happily, overjoyed that they had been invited.

But now things were different. They were not rejoicing and glorifying the Gospel. They were abandoning it and forsaking the very One who had called them so freely by His grace. Paul was shocked. He called them ‘deserters’, a description drawn from

political jargon that has both the idea of a military revolt, and a change of attitude. They were changing sides like traitors.

Bishop Lightfoot translates this, "Renegades. You are turning into renegades." It's a terrible thing when people do that politically and betray their country, but this was far worse. These people were deserting the God of grace who had called them freely out of darkness into light. The issue wasn't that they were abandoning Paul, or any apostle, and abandoning his message, but that they were deserting the LORD who had blessed them so greatly. He had freed them from this present evil age, (that's what Paul stated earlier in verse 4), delivered them from bondage to its evil powers when they were weak and helpless. And He brought them into His life, into the life of God, into His family, to freedom and made them whole.

Now they were turning away from Him and those blessings that He had given from their liberty—and putting themselves under law—what F. F. Bruce called “religious slavery”. Now that was astonishing to the apostle Paul. And what amazed him is they were ready to do it so quickly. Paul had hardly left them and they were swept away by the false teachers who had come in behind him.

But maybe that's not so uncommon after all; I'm afraid it's not. What do we sing so often on a Sunday morning? "Prone to wander, LORD, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love." Only the grace that called us can keep us. So we also sing, "A debtor to mercy alone," —and we certainly are.

Now, the grammar here is very important in understanding the spiritual condition of these Galatians. The word “deserting” is in the present tense, meaning they were still in the process of deserting the LORD. They had not yet completed that act—there was still hope for these people. They had not yet apostatized. They were like those people that are addressed in the Book of Hebrews who were struggling so much. Early on we learn about their condition: the author of Hebrews describes them in chapter 2 as ‘drifting’. (vs1). They were drifting and Paul believed the Galatians, here, were doing that—but that they were genuinely born again. He said that—that God had “called” them. And that word “called” is used of God's effectual call to salvation.

So the apostle Paul was convinced they were genuine believers. He says that later, in chapter 5, (vs10), "I have confidence in you in the LORD..." Not, 'I have confidence in you'—but "I have confidence in you in the LORD...", 'I have confidence in the LORD and His grace in you.' But again, all of this is a reminder of the spiritual situation and danger we are all in—we're always in. We've been delivered from this present evil age.

But this evil age is still present. We live in it; and it is against us and it's full of traps and temptations and cleverly devised errors. And we can be sure that wherever the Spirit of God is moving and doing a work, the devil will soon be there to try to frustrate it. And he has an arsenal of weapons that he can use to do that. He tries to stir up doubts about our salvation, or stir up doubts about the reliability of God's Word, or the authenticity of God's love, or the sufficiency of Christ's death—of His sacrifice, 'It's not enough. And of course, if Christ is not sufficient then we must rely upon ourselves and our own efforts to make up for what is lacking in the cross—what's lacking in the sacrifice of Christ. And that means turning to the Law.'

Luther had some insight into Satan's tactics; he had a lot of things to say about the devil. One thing he said is that, 'If he cannot ruin people by wronging and persecuting them, he will do it by improving them.' And that's what he was doing with the Galatians, 'improving them' by getting them under the Law where they could make themselves more acceptable to God by their religious deeds—self-improvement to gain divine approval. But Paul said that was deserting Christ and the truth for a different gospel.

King James version has, "...unto another gospel. Which is not another..." In other words, the Galatians were falling victim to a counterfeit. I like that translation in the King James version—it gives a sense of the irony and the danger of the situation. But the words translated "another", are two different Greek words. One of them means 'different'. The New American Standard Bible brings that out, (that distinction out), by translating it that way. It is a "different gospel". The Greek word is *heteros*. We get words from that word like 'heterodoxy', which is the opposite of 'orthodoxy'. Orthodoxy means 'straight'. *Orthos* is straight, and so orthodoxy is straight thinking; it's a correct opinion.

While heterodoxy means 'different opinion'—one that departs from correct beliefs. It's not straight. It gets off the path. It gets on the 'crooked way' and that refers to heresy.

The other word is *allos*. *Heteros* and *allos*. And *allos* means 'another gospel' in the sense of 'another of the same kind'. Dr. Johnson used to illustrate the difference between the two, (these two words), with the idea of a writing pen and imagine that he had gone to the store to buy a fountain pen like the one that he'd been using. And he brings in his pen and he shows it to the clerk and he says, "I would like to buy another pen.", (meaning an '*allos* pen', a pen of the same kind). So the clerk reaches under the counter and he pulls out a pen, but it's a ball point pen. It's 'another' pen, but it's a pen of 'a different kind'. It's not an *allos* pen—it's a *heteros* pen; not what was wanted—not what was asked for.

Well that's the kind of gospel the Judaizers had brought to Galatia, a different gospel from the one that Paul had preached. But how different? Some ball point pens look very similar to fountain pens. The difference is in the tip. And this different gospel had much the same appearance of the Gospel that Paul preached. And that's not surprising. It was a counterfeit. A good counterfeit always has the appearance of the thing that's copied. It has the appearance of the original. Good counterfeits and good counterfeiters don't copy Monopoly money or pass it off as real currency. They copy the real thing and try to duplicate it exactly—try to duplicate it in every detail; using the right paper, the right ink, the right lines, the right feel.

It was the same with this "different gospel" that had come to Galatia. It was very similar to the real thing. The Judaizers didn't deny Christ, at least not as far as we know. In fact, I think they certainly didn't. They claimed to be followers with the apostles in Jerusalem. They were in fellowship with them. In fact, they claimed to have been sent there to Galatia from Jerusalem and the men of Jerusalem. All they did was add one thing to the gospel—circumcision. One work of the Law. So it seemed like a biblical gospel. They're using something that's taught in the Bible—that's in the Old Covenant. And the addition that they make to the Gospel, it wasn't big, it was just one ritual done one time—not a major adjustment, was it?

According to Paul it was. He later writes, in Galatians, chapter 5, verse 2, "Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you." In other words, 'If you believe that Christ's work on the cross is not sufficient in and of itself for your salvation, that you must add your own work to it, then you've rejected the truth and you are not saved.' The reason is, that changes the whole nature of the Gospel and salvation—the salvation that the Gospel promises. It's no longer God's work that is received—it is man's work that is achieved. —That is not the Gospel. Salvation has always been a gift that could not be earned. It is only received through faith, and faith alone.

The Law was given to help Israel understand that, to show Israel its need. To show the people their sin and their inability. It was not given as a means of salvation. But the false teachers said that it was. So Paul says they were perverting the Gospel of grace. "...there are some who are disturbing you," Paul writes, "and want to distort the gospel of Christ." 'Distort' has the idea of changing it into the opposite. In fact, the idea literally is that of 'turning things upside down'—turning the Gospel on its head, so to speak. They wanted to overturn the Gospel of grace by adding one ritual—circumcision.

But grace cannot be mixed with works and still be grace. To illustrate that, one writer compares the Gospel to a chemical compound to which no mixture can be added. If you add one, you change the essential nature and lose the compound. Its the same with the Gospel. Adding something to it may seem harmless. After all, circumcision is, as I said, a simple ritual, a single rite, done only once, and only to a male. —But it's not harmless. It's like a small drop of poison. It may seem insignificant, but one drop contaminates the whole glass of water, and changes it into something from being healthy to being something being deadly.

So Paul calls these men 'troublers', 'disturbers'. It's another political term used of agitators, men who were subversives, who caused turmoil and confusion. That's what these teachers of the Law were doing in Galatia. They weren't helping. Paul says they were 'disturbing them', throwing them into a state of confusion.

Paul knew better than any man the effects of the Law. There is no peace in legalism. There is absolutely no assurance of acceptance with God in a life lived under the Law. All his life he had been seeking justification before God by Law keeping. That was the history of Paul's life. He gives it in Philippians, chapter 3, something of an autobiographical sketch of his life. He was a 'Law keeper'. And it was an endless effort, and it was a fruitless effort; and he learned that when he met Jesus on the Damascus road. That was when he learned the truth and first gained the assurance of salvation; confidence that he was accepted by God and absolutely secure. Now that came through faith in Christ and the realization that Christ was his righteousness—that on the cross the LORD did the work that Paul himself could not do—that Paul could never accomplish. Christ accomplished it and he received all of that through faith. So for him to see these people, for whom he cared so much, being sucked into error and pulled down into legalism, spiritual slavery, moved Paul to indignation—aroused his anger.

But his strongest language is reserved for the next verses. In fact, verses 8 and 9 contain some of the harshest words in the New Testament. "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" 'Anathema'! In other words, it is the message that matters—not the messenger that matters.

No one's status or authority can overrule the Gospel. The Gospel Paul preached is not true because Paul preached, it is true because it is the Gospel Christ gave him to preach. So anyone who would change it in the smallest way is, in Paul's words, "accursed". Literally, Paul means "damned". The issue is just that serious. And the reason is, by changing the message of grace to one of works offers to people a road to salvation that is really a road to perdition. So Paul's reaction is no overreaction. He says, "Let such people be given over to destruction." And he includes angels in this, and angels are spiritual beings, not material beings. So what is meant here is spiritual destruction to the judicial wrath of God.

I think we need to know that this wasn't personal animus on Paul's part against the people who challenged him or criticized him. Paul was a selfless and very tolerant person. When he was in Rome, in prison, and he wrote to the Philippians, he wrote to them in the first chapter about men who were there preaching the Gospel. And they were preaching the true Gospel. But they were doing it in order to gain personal prominence and doing so at the expense of Paul—trying to bring upon him actual harm. They were selfishly motivated. But Paul rejoiced in their preaching even though it cost him hardship, even though it was done from improper motives. But he rejoiced in it because the Gospel, the real, true Gospel was being preached—and the Gospel brings life, and that's what he cared about.

In Galatia the Gospel was not being preached and a false gospel brings death. That's the reason for Paul's statement. It is all about truth and life. And his concern here was that was being sacrificed at the expense and to the damage to his spiritual children.

So to emphasize the importance of a pure Gospel, he repeats the curse in verse 9, "As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" The Gospel cannot be compromised. The life of the church is at stake; the honor of Christ is at stake; the souls of men are at stake; a false gospel draws people to destruction.

Now one way the false teachers promoted their message was by attacking Paul's character. They smeared his motives in the ministry by claiming that he preached two different gospels. He preached their message, they said, when he spoke to Jews. But he eased the terms of the gospel when he was preaching to Gentiles by dropping circumcision from the message. So they accused him of being a man pleaser—of making the gospel easy and more appealing to Gentiles in order to win their favor and gain a following for himself. Paul, they were saying, 'is a flatterer. We're not, we give the full gospel, the hard gospel—faith plus works.'

So having defended his Gospel, Paul now defends himself. And he sets the record straight, for the sake of the Gospel—not for the sake of self. He asks in verse 10, "For am

I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men?" From the tone of his letter, from just these first ten verses, particularly the second five verses, it's clear he wasn't trying to please men. He just pronounced a curse, the severest curse, on these false teachers. That's not flattery. He certainly wasn't trying to win their approval. He was being blunt with the Galatians. He's being very straightforward. He had called them on their error and was not yielding an inch on his message. There was no indication in any of this of him being 'a man pleaser'. In chapter 3 he risks offending the Galatians by calling them "foolish". He wasn't being a flatterer in that. His words were tough and uncompromising.

But the fact of the matter is, Paul was the one who really cared about these Galatians. In fact, the false teachers, who had false motives, were trying to win their favor for themselves. Listen, it's far more an act of flattery and good salesmanship to peddle a gospel of works than it is to give a Gospel of free grace. Men don't respond well to that. They respond very well to the sense of merit and achievement on their own part.

And so this ancient heresy is very common today, it's very modern. It's heard in liberal churches across the country every Sunday. Right now there are sermons being preached like this where the essence of Christianity is explained as love, justice, mercy, and other virtues in contrast to salvation by grace alone. Machen said, "These are all just different ways of exalting the merit of man against the cross of Christ. All of them are attacks upon the very core of the Christian religion." Paul said to that, in all its forms of merit and achievement, "Anathema", "Be damned." What they deny and what they despise, these false teachers, is God's revelation—His very Words.

B. B. Warfield, over 100 years ago told his students at Princeton, "Every biblical text whose meaning you investigate, treat as a biblical text, a part of God's Holy Word, before which you should stand in awe." Now that is not only good advice for seminarians and professors in seminaries and preachers, it's good advice for every one of us. We all

should handle the Word of God as that, as the Word of God. And it should produce within us a sense of awe. This is God's revelation. This is unique of all literature that man possess. This is the revelation of God. And when we understand that, and when we do that, when we receive it with a sense of awe, we realize the only thing that we can boast in is God's mercy and grace. Salvation is an undeserved gift; "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling." That is what the church must preach and sing.

The church doesn't need marketers and salesmen—people who peddle a watered-down message. It needs people who teach the whole truth—the whole council of God—who don't care about the fleeting praise of men and want instead to hear the LORD's praise at the end of it all; "Well done good and faithful servant." (Matt 25:23). Paul was that kind of man, a model for all of us. A man who was fearless and tough—and he concludes, "...If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ." (vs10).

That word 'still', in "...still trying to please men...", may even look back to his days as a Pharisee and suggest that his zeal for the Law, which was genuine zeal, and his devotion to the LORD, which in his way was a genuine devotion, nevertheless his devotion to Judaism was in part to please men. There were mixed motives in this. But what he's saying here is Christ freed him from that dishonorable desire so that now his only desire was to please God and to serve Christ as his Savior.

Warren Wiersbe told a story about Giuseppe Verdi that when he produced his first opera in Florence. He stood by himself in the shadows and he kept his eye on the face of one man in the audience, the great Rocinni. It didn't matter to Verdi whether the people in the hall cheered him or jeered him; all he wanted to see was the smile of approval on the face of the master musician. Well the same could be said of Paul. He wrote, in 2 Corinthians 5, verse 9, "Therefore we also have as our ambition... to be pleasing to Him." Paul wanted, "to be pleasing to Him"—to Christ. And that, of course, should be our ambition as well.

And ultimately, those who have that as their ambition, are not only pleasing to God, but pleasing to men. Pleasing to those men and women who are drawn to God's

truth and life. Love sometimes requires stern words and hard action. It is willing to offend, for the moment, in order to heal forever. "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But deceitful are the kisses of an enemy." (Prov 27:6).

Paul was a true friend to the Galatians, a father to them. And his message is the true Gospel. Salvation is a gift. It is altogether received through faith—not achieved by works. We are sinners. We're undeserving. And Christ paid for our sins by His death, with the promise that all who believe in Him are forgiven and given life everlasting.

If you've not believed in Jesus Christ, look to Him, trust in Him, and be saved. You'll be saved at that moment—and forever. May God help you to do that, and help all of us to rest in this glorious Gospel; Salvation is of the LORD, not ourselves. We can praise Him for that. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this time together and we praise you for this great text from Your faithful apostle, who risked the friendship of these Galatian believers whom he loved by being tough with them, straightforward with them—giving them the truth uncompromisingly. And we benefit from it; if there's any sense of drifting in us, if there's any sense of flirting with something added to the Gospel, this corrects that. Correct us, LORD. Helps us to understand very clearly that salvation is a sovereign work of Your grace. It's what You accomplished in the cross through Your Son. Help us to reflect deeply on that.

Help us to reflect on that now, as we take the LORD's Supper and consider Your Son, and Your grace that sent Your Son and what He did for us on the Cross. Thank You for Him, and it's in His name we pray. Amen

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