

“That the Truth of the Gospel Might Be Preserved”

Galatians 2:1-10

Jim Davis

Welcome to Grace! If you have been with us for a while, you know that we have just finished up 1 Corinthians and next week we will be starting Jeremiah. When we switch from one series to another though, we like to take advantage of it by hitting pause and preaching on whatever we want to. My wife has been studying Galatians this fall and about a month ago the Lord used her to get me thinking more and more about this passage.

The gravity of this passage cannot be overstated. The church could have failed just 15 years after it started. And something happened here at this moment that insured that in one persons lifetime Christianity would spread all over the Roman Empire and beyond and have the full attention of the Emperor himself. So this morning, I'd like to look at this event from three angles:

I. Paul's concern

II. Paul's solution

III. Paul's mission

I. Paul's concern

Paul's concern is that the gospel was being compromised. We see this very clearly in verse 5:

to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

In the early church, there were lots of problems and disagreements just as there are now. We spent about a year looking at how messed up the church in Corinth was. There were legions of disagreements empire wide, but what kept these people together was the gospel. And I have thought about this quite a bit over the past month. As we walked through 1 Corinthians a number of disagreements were exposed in our own church. We had the opportunity to see that we don't all agree on certain aspects of the spiritual gifts, we don't all agree on the role of women in the church and, no surprise here, we don't all agree on end times. So how can we all go to church together? Because we believe the same gospel. And in light of this immense, revolutionary, foundation shattering good news of Jesus, all this other stuff quickly takes a back seat.

If you are an Ole Miss fan imagine for a moment that someone came to you said you have to watch Mississippi State games all season with JD Shaw AND you have to wear maroon AND you have to cheer WITH a cowbell. Would you be willing to do that? Now, what if that same person said they would pay you \$50,000,000. Bring on the cowbell!

In light of truly great news, differences that seem important go away fast! And this is what is happening all over the Roman empire. Differences that used to seem insurmountable were vanishing. Wealthy people were eating with peasants. Masters and Slaves were praying together. Women, who were seen as subhuman in Roman times, were now absolutely equally as valuable as men in the church. And probably the biggest divide, that between Jew and Gentile, was also going away. How was this

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possible? They had received news that was so incredible it purged them of the most deeply ingrained differences.

But now, this good news is being attacked and these beautiful, diverse, loving communities of believers all over the map were about to be torn apart. So what was this attack? What was this compromise being made on the good news? Well, we need to clarify what the good news is before we can better understand the compromise.

Gospel means good news. And the gospel says that we are sinful and have rebelled against a Holy and Perfect God. We have all fallen short of perfection by any measure of morality and that rebellion, must be addressed. We all must in a very real way be punished. For God not to punish rebellion compromises who He is: Perfectly Just.

Now, can I pause here for a second before we get to the actual good part? By God's grace I have had the opportunity to have in depth conversations with maybe more than a thousand people about the gospel. And I have never, not once, had someone disagree with me that they are sinful. Ever. It's clear as day to everyone I have ever talked with. I mean anyone who has ever been around kids can see this pretty clearly. We don't need to train them to bite, spit and throw fits. They come by this very naturally. Everyone I have ever talked to will readily admit their own shortcomings. But where I find disagreement is with the notion that our sin deserves punishment. People tend to understand we are sinful, but not bad enough to merit punishment in the after life.

And do you know what is going on here? Our sin is causing us to not appreciate how bad our sin is. It is causing us to gravely understate the dire nature of our condition. Many of you know that I wasn't a Christian most of my time at Florida State and one evening there was a football player causing some problems at the bar. So, all 160lbs of me decided I could handle him. The short version of the story is that everyone got to see the results of me vastly understating the nature of my condition. And for us to not see that our sin merits something terrible is doing the same thing: vastly understating the dire nature of our condition.

The reason our sin merits punishment is because of who it is we are sinning against. JD gave a very helpful illustration a couple years ago that helps us to understand this better. Imagine if you came up here and hit me in the mouth right now. What would happen? I'm pretty sure you won't have to worry much about my self defense skills. Maybe, you might get arrested, but almost immediately let go. If you hit the Governor though, you would be in jail for quite a while. Now, imagine if you hit the President of the United States. Likely, you would just get shot on the spot. But, if by some miracle you weren't killed right there, you would likely never see the sky again. In each case the crime committed is the same, but the importance of the person wronged increases. And as the importance of the person wronged increases, so does the punishment. Now, imagine wronging the One True, Holy, Loving, Perfect and Eternal God. And wronging Him much worse than a punch in the mouth. And tell me your sin doesn't merit an eternal punishment.

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That any of us are breathing right now is grace. But our God chose in His mercy to direct His punishment somewhere besides us. He came in the form of Jesus Christ. Lived the perfect life we never can while in a very real way enduring all the temptations we do and died the terrible death we all deserve on a cross. And what's more, everything that Jesus merited in His perfect life, we are given. So we and Jesus trade places. We merit hell and get heaven. He merits heaven and gets hell on the cross. And we see God's justice and love in the clearest possible way.

This is the gospel. We do nothing and He does everything. So to jump back into the text here, Paul has some people called the Judiazers who are coming in behind him after he establishes a church and they are telling the churches that Paul is a second rate Apostle and that his message is incomplete. They say to become a Christian you must first become a Jew and accept parts of the Jewish law like dietary regulations, festivals and circumcision. Now you have to imagine that the 'good news' is sounding a little less 'good' to many of the Gentile men in the church at this point. And if that joke doesn't make sense to you, ask you parents to explain it over lunch.

But, insanely, they are believing the Judiazers and Paul is livid. Do you know this letter to the Galatians is the only one where Paul has no praise for the church? I mean the Corinthians were suing each other and still received a measure of praise from Paul. The men in Thesolonika decided they didn't want to work anymore, but Paul still seemed find something good to say about them. But not the Galatians. Why was Paul so incensed? Because the gospel has been compromised. Paul will put up with a lot. He will give up as many of his own rights as he needs to to promote the gospel. But the moment the gospel is compromised, we get smack down Paul. Look at what he tells them...

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? 3:1

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— 1:6

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. 1:8

You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law...5:4

I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves! 5:12

Did you catch that? Paul is saying, “I wish those who are pushing circumcision would go ahead and castrate themselves. Yes, that is really in the Bible. So exactly how has the gospel been compromised? Because they are saying Jesus isn't enough. His sacrifice was insufficient and you need to take on these customs as well.

The very essence, the very foundation of the gospel is based on the understanding that there is no moral work or custom that can reconcile us to God. None! Our moral

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contribution to our salvation is about as significant as my kids contributions to making the house cleaner. William Temple famously said, **“The only thing we contribute to our salvation is the sin that makes it necessary.”**

We are very far from perfect and all that is required of us is to admit this and put our faith in the one who has accomplished it for us. Salvation is 100% a gift from God and because of this He gets the glory. Paul says this very clearly in Ephesians 2:8-9: **For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.**

I was given a fresh reminder of just how good this news is when I had the privilege of sharing this gospel with an Ole Miss student not long ago. As I spoke, the smile of this student just got bigger and bigger and when I had finished talking, the student said, “That is such great news!”

So can you see how the message of the Judiazers would contradict this Paul’s gospel? Once you add anything to the gospel as necessary for salvation, the gospel ceases to be good and ceases to be news. We are then saying Jesus’ sacrifice was not enough.

And here is the heart of the problem in Galatia. When we add any moral requirement, custom or any other ‘to do’ to the gospel, we draw glory away from Christ and to ourselves. We want to feel good about our sinful selves. We want to say, “Look at what I did! Look at how I have contributed to my own salvation!”

Now, my hunch is that no one here is really struggling with whether to add some Jewish law to your daily activity. But the heart of what Paul is fighting is no less prevalent. We all want to feel better about our sin and we are tempted daily to run to our own glory and not to Jesus for that comfort.

I was talking to a lady here in Oxford about how to choose a church home and she said, “I just think whatever makes you feel better about yourself on Monday will work.” Well, there are a lot of gospeless ways to feel better about yourself for a short period of time.

Some of us work tirelessly to change the outer appearance of our bodies in hopes of feeling better on the inside. Other of us make up for our shortcomings in the successes of our kids. “Little Johnny made straight ‘A’s and hit a home run in the same day. #humbled.”

Psychologists have pointed out for years that one way people cope with a low self-image is to get more degrees. We know deep down that something is off. That we fall short and we look to these pieces of paper on the wall to make up for it. To be able to say, “Look what I did!”

And the dangerous thing is that none of these things are bad. Community service is a great thing until you start looking at people and saying, “They don’t do nearly enough!!” It is great to go to church, to abstain from drunkenness, to wake up early and read your

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Bible, but when we begin to point to those things to feel better about our own fallen condition, we are pointing to ourselves. We are increasingly not pointing to Christ and this compromises the gospel.

Paul’s concern is that the Judiazers are pointing people to things other than Jesus to deal with their sin. Pointing people to diagnostics rather than the cure. And that is exactly what is still going on today. All these things we run to are simply diagnostics to better compare ourselves to other people. But only Jesus is the cure. The diagnostics will wear us out, but Jesus will do all the work if we let Him.

So that is Paul’s concern. What is his solution?

II. Paul’s solution

Paul’s solution is this: there is one gospel and we must not add or subtract from it. And I want to make three observations about Paul’s solution here.

The first is this: our culture can affect our understanding of the gospel. Verse 2:

I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

Paul went to the heart of the religion...Jerusalem. And he went as best I can understand because Jesus personally told him to. And upon first reading, it might sound like Paul is wondering if his version of the gospel was right. Maybe he was scared that he had gotten it wrong in some way. But this is absolutely not what is going on. It is exactly the opposite. Remember who first told Paul the gospel? The resurrected Jesus Himself. Paul has nothing but utter certainty about his gospel, but he is worried that the other apostles might get it wrong. And if they start adding things like circumcision to the gospel, much of what Paul had worked for would have been in vain. Paul wasn’t concerned about his message, but his fruit.

It would be really natural at this point to wonder how in the world did Paul think Peter, James and John who all walked with Jesus for years could possibly mess up the gospel. But Paul had an advantage the other apostles did not. Paul had been all over the empire. He had seen the gospel enter all kinds of diverse pagan cultures and transform them. The other apostles had stayed in Jerusalem and did not have this advantage. They did not have to think about certain implications of the gospel that Paul did. So what if you add a few festivals? So what if you add a few dietary restrictions? So what if you add circumcision? It won’t make that much difference. Not if you are in Jerusalem. But elsewhere the affects could be catastrophic.

What might have seemed like a small concession in Jerusalem would have possibly spelled the end of Christianity a mere 15 years after it began. And missionaries today deal with some of the same issues we don’t have to think about. Like what is required when a polygamist becomes a Christian? Do you tell him to divorce all but one of his wives? What do you do with natives who don’t cover up all the body parts like we do?

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Many missionaries have denied them into the faith until they take on Western clothing. What about an Italian who owns a vineyard and makes his living off of producing wine. In our part of the world there are people who would deny them church membership until they found a new occupation.

So here is my question for us. How does our culture affect the way we view and present the gospel? Do we bring culturally conditioned additions to our faith that might not belong? Maybe how a Christian should vote. Or how a Christian should dress. Or how a Christian should speak. How we school our children. We have about a hundred nations represented in this town not to mention Americans from every state in the Union and the more we interact with them, the better we might see how we bring culturally acquired additions to our gospel?

The second observation I want to make is this: Our opinions tend to be more unloving until the issue is real to us. Look at verse 3:

But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

Paul wisely doesn't just go with an argument, but with a person. Titus was a full on bacon eating Gentile who loved Jesus. Whose life was being transformed by him and who was beginning to show significant fruit in his life. Titus wasn't conveniently already traveling to Jerusalem, but we see in verse 1 that Paul 'took' him. Paul says, "You want to add circumcision to the gospel? Tell it to his face!"

Now this is really convicting to think about. I used to have strong and, frankly, arrogant views on child rearing before I had actual kids myself. And the longer I am a parent the more gracious I find myself becoming to loving parents with different views on parenting. I know I had an unloving view of divorce until I had to walk with loved ones through it.

Please don't hear me saying that it is bad to have an opinion. Certainly not! But our opinions tend to be more loving when we can put faces of loved ones on the issue. Paul brought Titus to put a face with an issue and we should always try and do the same.

Lastly, I want to look at Paul's confidence. Paul goes to Jerusalem and something interesting happens to his attitude. And if we are not careful we will interpret him to be arrogant. Look at verse 6:

And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.

Imagine if I were going to lunch with Archie Manning and I referred to him as "someone who 'seemed' to know a bit about football." Or if I was meeting with the President of the

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United States and called him “someone who ‘seemed’ influential.” That would sound fairly arrogant of me to say the least.

Paul though, isn’t arrogant because his confidence is not in himself, and clearly not in the other apostles, but in Jesus who sent him. Well placed confidence is confidence placed in Jesus. And it will change us.

Sometimes it gives us the confidence to march right into Jerusalem and face whoever we need to face. I remember being super impressed in High School when a Christian student threw himself in between a popular bully and the object of his bullying. His confidence in Jesus made him incredibly bold.

More often though, it might be that well placed confidence causes us to endure being wronged and to trust God that He will have things play out the way it should without us taking justice into our own hands.

We see Jesus doing both. We seem Him marching into Jerusalem as a King on a donkey and turning over the tables of money changers. But we also see Jesus in front of Pilot at His trial and when a simple answer would have saved His life, He remained silent to save ours.

Having a deep confidence that Jesus loves us and is in control is a game changer. We will be less defensive, less intimidating, more bold and more loving. And when the ultimate Accuser comes and reminds us of our sin. When he reminds us of things we would give our fingernails to forget. We can look him right in the eyes and with a supernatural confidence say, “What sin?? Jesus died for that and it exists no more! Be gone from me Satan!”

Paul’s solution is that there is one gospel and we must not add or subtract from it. And this is the fuel for Paul’s mission.

III. Paul’s mission

Let’s look at verses 7,8 and 9.

On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Something simply incredible has just happened. Though there are doubtlessly disagreements, they agree on the gospel and what could have been the end of Christianity becomes the source of a unity that transcends every natural divide: ethnicity, income, political views, sex, traditions, style of dress, football team and even

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non-gospel theological issues. And this unity on the gospel and charity on all other things propels the gospel to every part of the world.

When we add o the gospel we take glory away from Christ and put it on ourselves. And you know what? Our glory is not that impressive. People will not be drawn by what we wear, how we vote, how many degrees we have, what our kids excel at, how far we can run or how many Bible verses we know. But you know what will draw them in? Jesus. When we display daily that we have done nothing, but Jesus has done everything, that will get peoples' attention. This is the news Paul brought the Gentiles and Peter the Jews.

I am convinced that Grace is coming up on a really exciting season. Oxford is not an unimportant city. The world is coming here. By all accounts we are about to see growth over the next ten years that few communities will ever experience. There is a mission in front of us that we can only face if we are unwaveringly united in the gospel. If we are absolutely unwilling to let go of this gospel of peace with God only through the works of Jesus Christ AND if we are absolutely willing to let go of almost everything else that will threaten to divide us and take our eyes off Christ as we go. This is my prayer for Grace as a church family and my prayer for the other faithful Christian churches in Oxford.

Let's pray.