

3.

GALATIANS 1:6-10

I. REJECT THOSE WHO TEACH YOU A DIFFERENT DOCTRINE

A. Paul's Initial Appeal to Reject Salvation by the Law

Introduction

After only a few words of greeting, Paul dove immediately into the purpose for which he was writing this letter. He was deeply concerned that the Galatian churches were turning away from his teachings about the grace of God and were accepting a different gospel that was not the Gospel at all. He told them he was amazed that they could so quickly change their beliefs, but he made it clear that he knew they were making the change because they were being influenced by others. He said he was amazed “even if” some were trying to influence them. The Greek expression translated “even if” is literally “if but.” It has the same meaning as the English expression “even if,” which indicates he thought they should have been strong enough in their faith to resist letting anyone turn them away from what they had learned from him.

Paul did not identify who the people were who were influencing the Galatians, and he did not explain what false doctrine those people were teaching. He simply declared that it did not matter who they were, because they should not listen to anyone who turned them away from the grace of Christ. They should have known it was false without trying to answer their arguments. If what they were teaching was different from the doctrine of the grace of God that Paul had taught them, it was a false doctrine. They should have so much confidence in the doctrine that they would know that anyone who taught something contradictory to was teaching falsehood and should be condemned. Paul emphasized that point so firmly that he said that, even if he and his companions or an angel from heaven should preach some other doctrine to them, they should be condemned. Paul and his companions could be wrong. Even some angels have rebelled against God, but the Gospel of grace is true and should never be doubted.

Paul knew he was running the risk of alienating the Galatians by being so blunt, but he did not care. He was not trying to please men, but God. He was sold out of God, and God's opinion of him was all that mattered. He asked them if they thought he sought to satisfy men or God. He asked it again even more emphatically. He said, “So! Do I seek to please men, because if I do I am not a slave to Christ.” His words were a strong condemnation of anyone who teaches a doctrine that contradicts the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.

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Verses 6-7a. **6 I marvel that you are being changed so quickly from the One calling you through the grace of Christ.**

7 To a different gospel, which is not just a variation of the Gospel, though some are troubling you, wanting to pervert the Gospel of Christ.

I marvel that you are being changed so quickly. After his brief words of greeting and blessing, Paul rushed immediately into his great concern. He had heard that the churches in Galatia were turning away from what He had taught them. From the book of Acts, we know that Paul had gone to great lengths to travel to them and had suffered severe opposition in presenting his message to them (Acts 13:13-14:26). In spite of severe opposition, they had received his message eagerly. Now it was shocking to him that they were turning away from what they had received so gladly.

Paul emphasized that they had turned away soon, which must mean soon after he had left them. Paul did not say where he was or how much time had intervened. As he proceeds with his letter, we can gain strong hints as to how soon they had turned away, but his statement in this verse shows that it could not have been an extended period of time. For further discussion of the amount of time Paul had been away from them, see *A THIRD RELATED ISSUE: When and Where Did Paul Write His Letter to the Galatians?* In Volume 9, pages 9-10).

Paul’s statement of how quickly the Galatians were turning away from what he had taught them is evidence of the impetuous nature of the Galatians and the Phrygians. They had shown the same characteristic when Paul was ministering among them. In Antioch, when the Jewish synagogue

resisted Barnabas and Paul’s message, Paul and Barnabas turned to the Gentiles and almost the whole town gathered to hear their message the next sabbath. Soon, however, the Jews, especially Jewish “religious women of high standing” (HCSB), stirred up those same people against Barnabas and Paul and they expelled them from their city (Acts 13:42-52). In Iconium, the same pattern occurred. At first a great number of Jews and Gentiles believed, but soon the Jews poisoned their minds. A mob made up of both Jews and Gentiles and even city officials planned to attack them and stone them to death, causing Paul and Barnabas to have to flee the city (Acts 14:1-7). In Lystra, when the Lord used Paul to heal a lame man, the people of the city concluded Barnabas and Paul were Zeus and Hermes, and they set about to worship them with a great celebration. Only with great difficulty were Barnabas and Paul able to discourage them from doing so. Not long afterward, Jewish opponents of Barnabas and Paul stirred up a crowd, and the crowd dragged Paul out of the city, stoned him, and left him for dead. All of these incidents show that the Galatians were easily influenced and could quickly switch their opinions and their actions from one extreme to another.

In spite of all the obstacles, Paul and Barnabas won many converts and a church was established in each of those cities, but the quick swing of the people’s opinions from one extreme to another created instability in their congregations. The people of south Galatia to whom Paul was writing were not ethnic Galatians but Phrygians. However, they either had similar emotional characteristics to the northern Galatians, or their northern neighbors had strongly influenced them. Later, when Paul was writing this letter to them, they were showing the same characteristics by quickly turning away from what Paul had taught them.

from the One calling you through the grace of Christ. Paul immediately revealed the seriousness of the turn they were making. He told them they were turning away “from Him who called you.” The One who had called them could be no other than the God Paul had preached to them. They were not just turning from Paul and not just turning from Paul’s teachings. They were turning away from God Himself. No wonder Paul was severely distressed.

Something of the nature of the doctrine they were accepting is revealed by Paul’s emphasis that God had called them “through the grace of Christ.” If they were turning away from God who had called them through the grace of Christ, they must have been rejecting the doctrine of grace salvation, which alone provides salvation for all who believe. Grace was for Paul the greatest of all truths, because it had set him free from the shackles of salvation by works, which he had tried so hard to follow and had failed. It was appalling to him that the Galatians were turning away from that grace after he had suffered so much to make it available to them.

To a different gospel, which is not just a variation of the Gospel. In these words, Paul gave further insight into how the Galatians were turning away from God’s grace. They were accepting a different gospel, which was an entirely different kind of belief. Paul said the doctrine they were accepting was not just a slight variation of the good news he had delivered to them. It was a completely different teaching. They were turning away from the true Gospel to a false doctrine. That doctrine had to be some form of salvation by works. The exact nature of the doctrine they were accepting becomes clearer as Paul proceeds with his appeal to them. What he said in this verse was enough to show they were turning away from the Gospel of Grace altogether to a completely different way of belief.

Though some are troubling you. Paul said some were troubling them by introducing them to the false gospel. The strong implication is that the false teachings had come from outside of the Galatian churches. If it had begun among them, it would have begun with a small group and produced discussion and debate. Paul gave no indication that

it had happened in that manner. He did not say they were divided over the question or even that they were debating it among themselves. Whatever the false doctrine was, they had all gone after it together. The implication is that some influential people had come from elsewhere and impressed the Galatians so greatly that they all had embraced the false doctrine together.

wanting to pervert the gospel of Christ. By these words, Paul gave another strong indication of who the people were who had come to trouble the Galatian churches. They were people who wanted to corrupt the gospel that came from Christ. Only one influential group existed among Christians at that time that held to a doctrine that opposed Paul’s teachings about Christ’s grace. They were legalistic Jewish Christians who had opposed Paul’s teachings in Antioch and who later plagued his ministry everywhere he went. They taught that the grace of Christ alone was not enough for salvation. They insisted that to be saved a person also had to accept and obey the ritualistic law that had been given to Moses at Sinai. It was the same Jewish legalism that Paul had fought to defend before Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and which he had rejected only because Jesus Himself had appeared to him. Paul knew from experience the dangers of that doctrine, because he had fought for it with all his energies and had been convinced against his own will that it was wrong. He knew what fanatic zeal and what harsh unloving attitudes it had created in him. He did not want to see it have the same damaging effect on the Galatian churches.

8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel to you besides the one we preached to you let him be condemned.

9 As we have said before, also now I say again, if anyone preaches a gospel to you beside the one you received let him be condemned.

Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach any other gospel to you besides the one we preached to you. Paul was so sure the doctrine he had taught the Galatians was correct that he urged them not to accept any other gospel, even if he preached it to them himself or if an angel from heaven preached it to them. Paul had been wrong before, when he acted on his own insights and sought to annihilate Christianity. He still was capable of making mistakes; but the doctrine he had taught them could not be wrong because it had come from God. So, even if he made a mistake and taught some other doctrine to them, they should not believe it

Furthermore, even if an angel came to them and preached some other doctrine, they still should not believe it. Angels have rebelled against God and become demons, and those fallen angels can make themselves appear to be angels of light (2 Cor. 11:14). One who appears to be an angel sent from God can be wrong, but the gospel cannot be wrong. It was sent from God in heaven. Its truth does not depend on who preaches it. It is truth because God declared it. The truth can authenticate a preacher, but a preacher does not authenticate the truth. It authenticates itself because it came from God.

let him be condemned. Paul felt so strongly about how wrong the doctrine the Galatians were accepting was that he declared anyone who preached it should be condemned. The word translated “condemned” is one Greek word that most English-speaking Christians have heard. It is the word **anathema**. It contains the same idea as the Hebrew word **cherem**, which referred to a person or a group of people who were condemned to destruction and death along with all their possessions because they totally rejected and opposed Jehovah God. Examples of people who were condemned to complete destruction for absolutely rejecting Jehovah God are: the Amorites in Bashan (Num. 21:2-3; Deut. 2:34; 3:6; Josh. 2:10), the Canaanites (Deut. 7:1-5; 20:16-18; Josh. 6:17-25), any nation that sought to annihilate Israel (Deut. 20:10-15), and an Israelite individual or city that rejected Jehovah and worshipped another god (Lev. 7:28-29; Deut. 13:5-18; 20:10-15; Josh. 7:1, 10-26). When Paul said, “let them be condemned,”

he meant that those who were perverting the Galatians were preaching an error that was equally dangerous. Therefore, they should be condemned to that same utter destruction. Paul used strong words because he knew the doctrine that was being taught to the churches in Galatia would totally destroy the truth Jesus had revealed to him and had commissioned him to spread around the world. Undermining the Gospel of Grace is still no small misdemeanor. It is stark rebellion, and it needs to be opposed with all the energy God’s people can muster, because it will destroy the truth. It will also destroy those who accept it.

As we have said before, also now I say again, if anyone preaches a gospel to you beside the one you received, let him be condemned. Paul emphasized again the seriousness of the false doctrine they were accepting by repeating what he had said. This time he did not say they should reject any other doctrine preached to them, but they should reject any doctrine other than the one they already had received. He made it clear that the condemnation would come from the false message they accepted, not the messengers who delivered it.

Verse 10. For do I try to satisfy men or God? So! Do I seek to please men? For if I seek to please men, I am not a slave of Christ.

For do I try to satisfy men or God? Paul was not being diplomatic when he condemned those who troubled the churches in Galatia with false doctrines. He knew his strong words would be resented by some, but he spoke them anyway because he did not try to please men but God. He asked the Galatians if they knew him to be a man who sought to please men or God. If they thought he sought to please God, they would understand that he risked offending them in order to please God and rescue them.

So! Do I seek to please men? Then he asked the question again, beginning with a little Greek word that called them to attention. It is translated above as “So!” In everyday English, it could well be translated “Hey!” Since he was writing to them, they could not answer him directly; but he wanted them to answer the question to themselves in their

own minds. Their answer would influence the way they responded to what he was writing to them.

For if I seek to please men, I am not a slave of Christ. They needed to seriously consider what Paul was asking them, because if he was trying to please men he was no longer Christ's servant. In that case, they did not need to pay attention to what

he said. On the other hand, if he was seeking to please God, they needed to hear and believe what he was writing to them, because their response could lead them back to the truth leads into everlasting life instead of following falsehood into eternal destruction.