



**Galatians 1:6-10**  
**There's Only One Gospel**

Summary: Other popular gospels compete for your allegiance in life, but they lead to a curse instead of God's grace.

The New Testament is composed mainly of letters. These are usually written by an apostle – someone directly commissioned by Jesus – and they're addressed to an individual, a church, or a group of churches. They often start the same way, with an introduction, who is writing this, and who they're writing to, along with a greeting – typically grace and peace to you, and then there's usually some note of kindness or encouragement and often a prayer.

But not Galatians. Here Paul provides the introduction and greeting, wishes them grace and peace, and then cuts right to the point: *what is going on with you guys? I've heard some crazy reports and I can't believe it. You're in danger of committing spiritual treason, you're in danger of turning away from the gospel of Jesus Christ. You're about to completely wreck what we so carefully built. Do you understand what you're doing?*

Read with me:

**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.

Those are strong words. So, you have to ask – is he overreacting? Is this such a big deal? What made Paul so upset?

Well, in order to answer that, you need to know the book of Galatians is Paul's attempt to call *Christians* back to simple faith in Christ *while* other religious people were encouraging them to keep Jesus, but add a few more things to their faith – specifically, the Jewish customs and traditions and especially, circumcision. They were being told in order to be a good Christian, you also needed to be a good Jew. It was OK to follow Jesus, but you needed to follow Moses too.

The problem is, according to God's math – Jesus plus anything equals nothing. It's like multiplying with a zero – it doesn't matter how big of a number you start with, if you multiply it times zero, you get zero back.

So, here's what we need to understand this morning. Three things:

- First, there are other "gospels" that beckon you away from Christ.
- Second, that is true for Christians and non-Christians.
- But, third, these other "gospels" end in a curse, while the gospel of Jesus begins with grace and leads to life.

Let's dig into each of those. First, we see very plainly: *there are other gospel messages competing for our attention*. Last week we said everyone seems to know something is wrong with the world, something is wrong with our relationships, with our daily experiences, and with the direction things are headed. We all agree, there's a problem.

But, people disagree about what the problem is, and how best to handle it. This is where other gospels come in, they each offer their own diagnosis and solution, a path to follow, a treatment protocol for the ills of the world and your life.

Now, the reality is: most of us are influenced by gospel syncretism, which is just a fancy way of saying we have a salad bar style approach to our philosophies and beliefs. We take a little bit of what we experienced growing up, and then a little bit of that that we learned in college, and some of the stuff we've been hearing from this one person we really like listening to and we blend it all together.

That's exactly what was happening in Galatia – they had Jesus, but now people were telling them they needed to add to that, put a little more on their plate.

Now, life is a pretty big salad bar, so we can't cover all the different gospels you'll run across, but let me point out some of the most common.

These are not meant to be in any significant order, but since we're here in church, let's start with moralism. The gospel of moralism teaches that you can be saved by virtue, and Jesus is a really good example and teacher, He's a great life coach and mentor – so listen to what He says, and follow His example when you can.

This is the most common gospel presented in liberal churches where "all are welcome." The message is: just be a good and loving person – emphasize kindness because good people make God happy. Moralism says God is holy, but He grades on a curve and you'll be OK as long as your GPA is high enough.

Tim Keller points out, this is OK if you're already a somewhat virtuous person. But what if you're broken? What if you've been bad? What if you're not strong enough on your own? The true gospel says Jesus is actually a substitute for our weakness and brokenness. But the gospel of moralism says, sorry, you're stuck pal – you need to be a good person, so try harder.

And, again, if you have the right temperament and environment, you might think you're doing OK. But most people struggle with keeping up under a gospel of moralism. Most

people need a little reassurance that things will work out OK and so this often leads to the gospel of Universalism.

Universalism says, things eventually work out for everyone, because, in the end, deep down, we're all good people, right? Well, at least most of us. Universalism sounds good, it's very tolerant, very inclusive, kind of a "you do you" and follow your own truth, all paths lead to God so why all the fighting? I'm just going to slap a Coexist sticker on my Prius and sip some tea.

The problem with Universalism is, it can't explain the cross. If God will eventually save everyone, or at least almost everyone, why did Jesus have to suffer and die on the cross and then command His followers to tell others about it? If God would eventually save everyone, even those who never heard of Jesus, or heard of Him and still chose to follow their own path, isn't the cross a bit gratuitous? What good does it do? What was the point? Couldn't we all just do our own thing and wait for salvation?

The true gospel says the death of Jesus was a substitution for us. We deserve to be punished by God for our wrongs, our sins, but Jesus, though completely innocent took that punishment in our place – He paid our fines so that we don't have to.

Related to Moralism and Universalism is the gospel of Ritualism. This gospel says you need to follow the rules. You do things to make God happy – you might wear certain things or not wear other things, you might eat certain things and not eat others, you make sure you always say your prayers, or you always go to the Candlelight Christmas Eve service.

The point is – you follow the rules, you do the things, and *because you're doing them*, you know you're good. You may mess up in other areas of life, but you've got your cross necklace, so God knows. The problem with ritualism is you don't always feel like keeping your own rules, or you forget, or maybe you mess up so much your rituals don't seem to help. And if that's true, then you start looking for other rituals and rules, or ways to do them better. Meanwhile the true gospel is a gospel of grace, a free gift from God to you. You don't earn it, and you don't maintain it through your unbroken streak of observances.

A fourth gospel is the gospel of Materialism. This gospel says the answer to your problems is more and better stuff. You need a house, a nice house – it doesn't matter how you define it, that might mean something small and tidy or something big and sprawling, a downtown condo or a remote cabin in the woods, the answer to your problems is having that place, that place would make life better for you or will show other people that you've made it.

Of course, it's not just homeownership – it could be a device, maybe you think you really need a phone, or a new phone or a data plan. Maybe it's a cute pair of ankle boots, or a new tool for your workshop. Instead of reading Scripture, you scroll through your gospel online or in catalogs, and you're waiting for the day when you have enough money to make your offering and get your blessing.

Here's the problem, the gospel of materialism leads us to lust and covet, and to put our hope and trust in things that can be broken, stolen, or just wear out. The gospel of materialism is a treadmill of acquisition – you exert all this effort and energy and never go anywhere. Your closets and countertops become temporary storage for stuff on it's way to the dump, the donation pile, or the next yard sale as you make room for the next thing.

Related to the gospel of materialism is the gospel of achievement, because achievement can help you grow in materialism.

The gospel of achievement says the problems of life are solved by going more places, doing more things, getting more done. You make a list of goals and attack it. You build your bucket list and get after it. You find the path and follow it or blaze it, nothing is going to hold you back. You can do anything you set your mind to. You don't have time for the doubters, the haters, or the lazy complainers.

But the true gospel says God calls out to the weak, the wounded, the hurting, the lost, the helpless, and shows us His strength. The true gospel says all of our righteous deeds are worth nothing in the sight of God. All of your 'one day I'm gonna,' and even your 'look at me now!'s, eventually fade into memories of "when you used to," or used to be, or they throb as regrets of the things you couldn't accomplish.

Mark Dever is the pastor of Capital Hill Baptist Church over in DC, literally on Capitol Hill where countless people are chasing the gospel of achievement. I once heard him say, "We have to help people see that at the end of the day throwing your life away for a career is no different from throwing it away for drugs." In other words, from the eternal perspective, there's little difference between the woman wearing the power suit, dashing to her next important meeting with the next important person and the heroin addict she passes by who's laying on the park bench. Neither is living their life for God, they're both addicted to their own forms of salvation.

There are many other gospels, and many different varieties that we can form by joining parts and pieces together, but let me come back to another one that we mentioned last week simply because this is the one so many people are preaching right now – the gospel of patriotism and politics.

We have an election coming up this week and it is incredibly divisive. Each side feels that the other poses an existential threat to our nation and our freedoms. Each side says voting for their candidate and platform is the only thing that can save us. They are fervent and zealous in evangelizing for their party because they believe their party will make life better and the other party will make life worse. And for some people, this is all they have. The outcome of the election will either fill them with despair or hope, but it all hinges on the ballots.

Meanwhile, the true gospel says that Jesus is the everlasting King. He's not on the ballot because He's not running.

Would you turn in your Bibles with me, because I want you to see this, I want you to be able to find it on your own this week – turn in your Bibles to Psalm 2.

Here we see a contrast between the position and power of our eternal King Jesus and the position and power of the kings and queens, prime ministers, and presidents of this world. We see the political powers of earth and the eternal power of God are often on two separate paths headed for conflict and we see the reaction of each.

**Ps 2:1** Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
2 The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”

4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;  
The Lord shall hold them in derision.  
5 Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,  
And distress them in His deep displeasure:  
6 “Yet I have set My King  
On My holy hill of Zion.”

7 “I will declare the decree:  
The LORD has said to Me,  
‘You *are* My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
8 Ask of Me, and I will give *You*  
The nations *for* Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.  
9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.’”

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.  
11 Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.  
12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish *in* the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

I want you to see – Scripture is clear – the leaders of the nations and even the corporations of this world are often at odds with God, and God is not intimidated or impressed. In fact, when you read Scripture you quickly learn that God is often at work in, with, and through political leaders, even though they are very rarely completely dedicated to Him.

The message of the political gospel is: the world will end if our party doesn't win. But the true gospel is built on the promise that no matter who sits in the White House, Jesus has made a place for us in His Father's house and so, we are able to say:

**1 Tim 1:17** Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

These are just a few of the competing gospel stories we hear – the attempts people make to describe what is wrong with the world and how to fix it.

So, why are we talking about all of this in church? The answer is: because Christians in Galatia were hearing another gospel story, adding it to the one true gospel of Jesus Christ. They didn't stop coming to church, they were just adding something to Jesus, not realizing that the mixture was theologically toxic. And my brothers and sisters in Christ, we must realize: it's possible to do the same thing today. It is possible that you are adding something to Jesus. It is possible that you're following some other message.

Paul says *to the church*,

**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, which is not another

Not another because there can be no other if this one is true. The composition and content of the gospel is not a matter for personal preference, it's not something we can tweak here and there, add a little of this, take out some of that – it's a unified whole, take something away or add anything new and it's no longer what it was.

In fact, the language of turning away is the same language used of soldiers deserting the army, or people defecting from one political party to another. You're not bringing something new in with you, you're actually leaving your original post to go to something else. In other places the Bible uses the idea of spiritual adultery, leaving Christ for the sake of a relationship with something else. This is absolutely critical for us to notice, for as John Stott, the respected evangelical scholar noted in his commentary on this passage: "It is impossible to forsake the gospel without forsaking God."

Stott goes on to say: "the church's greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those outside who oppose, ridicule and persecute it but those inside who try to change the gospel."<sup>1</sup>

And that has been a threat since the beginning. Those of you who know your Bible well may remember that after Israel had been delivered from Egypt, after they received the Law at Mount Sinai, after they made a covenant with God, Moses went up the mountain to meet

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<sup>1</sup> Commentary, 23

with God and he's only gone a few days before they turn to Aaron and say, let's add something to all of this, let's make some golden calves...

They had a relationship with God, but they began to have some other ideas, and they began to wander away.

Those you doing the study in James right now know the book ends with these words about people wandering from the faith:

**James 5:19** Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

The book of Hebrews warns Christians of the danger of wavering in our faith

**Heb 10:23** Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful.

Paul writes to Timothy, giving him instruction on how to pastor the church in Ephesus, what should his ministry look like, what do Christians need to know, and he says:

**2 Tim 4:1** I charge *you* therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: 2 Preach the word! Be ready in season *and* out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. 3 **For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;** 4 and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. 5 But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

Christians, this is written about the church! You, and I, can develop itching ears, and heap up for ourselves teachers who tell us about other gospels – and that's not always calling us away from Jesus, it may simply be encouraging us to make something else as important or a little more important. Hold Jesus in one hand, and this in the other.

By the time you get to Revelation at the end of the Bible you find Jesus issuing warnings to churches. He tells Sardis, I know your works, but you're dead. He tells Ephesus, I know your works, but you've left your first love. Hear the warning - they're still in church, *but their hearts have wandered*. It's no longer all about Jesus, it's about Jesus, and this – Jesus and morality, Jesus and universalism, Jesus and my rituals or charms, Jesus and my stuff, Jesus and my achievements, Jesus and my party or politician.

None of this is the true gospel, and we, as the church, as Christians, need to see – that it very, very, possible for us to go chasing a spiritual squirrel that distracts us from Jesus.

I want you to see this as clearly as possible one more time:

**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

My friends, is anything leading you to turn away **from Him** who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel?

Which “gospel” do you hear most often? Which appeals to you the most? What are you most likely to *add* to the one true gospel?

And, what are the voices promoting that gospel – how are those false-evangelists getting your attention? Where do you let their voices into your life? Notice Paul says, I don’t care if it comes from an angel or an apostle, regardless of reputation or credentials – beware! In fact, if they preach anything else, let them be accursed – let them go to hell. Those are harsh words, because this is a serious subject!

And it should lead us to ask: are there voices I need to shut off, turn down, or overwhelm with truth in my life – where are the false gospels creeping in?

The true gospel is that we are sinners, but God is gracious. We need salvation and He provided it, He performed it, and He proclaimed it.

The true gospel is a liberation from fear, anxiety, and guilt – you don’t feel the weight of anything resting on you because the true gospel says it’s not up to you. It’s up to God. He invites you to play a role, but if you don’t show up, He’ll still get it done.

That’s a good reminder for us all, especially going into this week – no matter how the elections turn out, the gospel is done, and nothing can undo it, so let’s keep an eye on ourselves and each other and make sure we don’t turn away by trusting in anything else.

Let us say, with Paul:

**Galatians 2:20** I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

We’re going to have communion now, and this is a good to chance to take a moment and seek the Lord, be honest with Him about your fears and your frustrations, tell Him the truth about the things that are weighing heavily upon you, and then let Him remind you that He knows, that He sees, and that He is still in control. Let the elements of communion remind you that He has already sealed the deal, the King has been to the cross and now He is on the throne.

Let’s pray.