

A new series called: *How to be a 'Good Christian' and other religious nonsense*

- A verse by verse study of the book of Galatians
- But it centers on a single theme/truth
- The truth is simple, but vital
 - **The only way to live the Christian life is by applying the Gospel**

The Gospel tells us that we are bad—worse than we can possibly imagine, but that we are loved—more loved than we dare to imagine

- And so Jesus did for us what we could not do for ourselves
 - **Jesus performed perfectly and paid completely**
- Now, we are forgiven and cleansed, accepted and adored
- All by grace through faith (when we repent)
- That is the Gospel

Religion says something else:

- I posted the title of the series on Facebook and got some comments
- “Hmm... I bumped a rubber trash can in Montecito with my Reality sticker on my car and the homeowner called me a ‘bad Christian.’” –via Facebook
 - “You did not drive well, you are a bad Christian! Good Christians drive well!”
 - What verse is that?
 - The other Facebook comment...
 - “Good pastors teach verse by verse only”
 - What verse is that... since you know them all
 - There is this pressure from all sides (believers and non-believers)
 - To be and do better... to be ‘Good Christians’
 - But that is merely religion (void of the Gospel) talking
 - The Bible says no such thing and makes no such distinction
- **Religion says:** You need to be and do better
- **The Gospel says:** Christ **is** and **has** done better for you
- **Religion says:** You need to work at being a ‘Good Christian’
- **The Gospel says:** You are totally bad but have been made completely righteous (good with God) by the **work** of Christ—not your own work
- **Religion says:** If you perform well you will be more loved and accepted
- **The Gospel says:** You **are** perfectly accepted and loved

Many Christians get the Gospel for salvation, but not for living

- The Gospel is for Christians
- It must not only be **believed** for salvation, but **applied** for life ([The Gospel por Vida!](#))
- This is the argument of Galatians

Galatians is:

- **A letter** written to the churches in a place called Galatia (modern day Turkey)
- **vv. 1-5**

- Paul is writing the letter (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) to correct some errors that were taking place in the church
- And Paul is mad! (notice he did not offer his usual rejoicing over them and prayer for them)
 - Because the situation is dangerous!
- Paul had planted the church sometime before and now in his absence some people were teaching something wrong and dangerous
 - Dangerous, because (1) it is contrary to the Cross, (2) if it took hold, Christianity would have become just another sect of Judaism that was about keeping the rules rather than having been transformed
- **Here is what these people were teaching:**
 - = Now that the Galatians had heard, believed and responded to the Gospel and became Christians they had to begin to do what “Good Christians” do
 - Which from the perspective of the place and people and time was to do Jewish things (be circumcised and obey the law)
 - It was fine to begin the Christian life by believing the Gospel
 - **What Jesus did not what we can do**
 - **The finished work**
 - **What has been accomplished for us**
 - **The position/acceptance we have in Christ**
 - But now (they would say) it is time to grow, and if you really want to be a “**Good Christian**” you will do certain things

Paul (the Bible) is going to say “No! No! No!” (**Verse 6-9**)

Verse 6

- I am **shocked** that you are **turning away** (NASB = **deserting**)
 - **Turning away/deserting** signifies “a transfer of one’s allegiance”
 - It was used of soldiers in the army who revolted or deserted and of people who change sides in philosophy or politics¹
 - **I.e. a ‘turncoat’**
 - Paul is saying the Galatians are religious turncoats, spiritual deserters
 - They were turning from the **gospel of grace** to a **gospel of works**
 - **Not for salvation—but for living (this is addressed to Christians)**
 - They did not deny that you had to believe in Jesus to be saved but **they added** that you had to be circumcised and keep the Law as well
 - In other words, “you must let Moses finish what Christ has begun”
 - Cf. “you must finish yourself by obedience to the Law what Christ has begun”
 - You must add your work to Christ’s work
 - To do this is to turn away **from God** Paul says!
 - I am shocked you are turning away so soon... **from God**
 - To desert, turn away from, revolt against God!

¹ John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 21-22.
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- An insult and affront to the finished work of Christ on the Cross
 - **To have been saved by grace, but try to live according to performance (and seeking merit in it) is to desert God!!!**
- Paul will have nothing to do with this!!
 - **Verse 8**
- Salvation **and Christian living** are by grace through faith alone in the finished work of Christ alone!
- Only this is actually **Good News**
 - It is not good news to say that once you have been saved you now need to start working hard to perform well!!
 - **The never ending trap of performance and feeling like a good or bad Christian**
 - We have been saved from the slavery of that!
 - Galatians 5:1

So Christ has truly set you free. Now make sure that you **stay free**, and do not get **tied up** again in **slavery** to the law.

Here is how that is slavery (and dangerous!)

- A failure to grasp the implications of the Gospel and apply it to our lives will always lead us to 2 equal but opposite errors: Pride and/or shame

Many of us suffer from one (and at alternate times both) of these issues: Pride and shame

- We either **feel incorrectly good** about who we are and what we have done or we **feel incorrectly bad** about who we are and what we have done.
- Some of us (yours truly) vacillate between the two (frequently)

In addition to creating wrong and sinful feelings and desires within us (**which affect how we feel about and relate to God**), these equal and opposite errors determine the way that we **act toward and deal with people**

- When we think **too highly** of ourselves we are cold, cruel and demanding of others.
- When we are **ashamed** of ourselves we try to hard to please other people
 - **Both of these lead to a lifetime of bad, unhealthy and dysfunctional behaviors and relationships**

The Gospel is the answer!

- To the Christian who thinks too highly of himself or herself, the gospel says, "You are a sinner. You are wicked and bad. You have done nothing to earn anything of any value before God. Your efforts to do better and be better than others are meaningless. Even the best things you have done are filthy rags before the Lord. It isn't about you or what you can do! It is about Jesus and what He has done for you. You are helpless and lost. BUT, you are saved! And you are more loved and accepted than you can ever imagine."
- To the Christian trapped in shame the Gospel says, "You are more loved and accepted than you can ever imagine! You have full approval! Everything you ever did that was so wrong and wicked has been removed and dealt with and forgotten! You have been washed! You have been cleansed! You are forgiven and made righteous! There is no need to try to impress God, you are fully adored."

These Gospel truths and our acceptance with God then, change the way that we live relationally with people as Christians

- They free us from the need to:
 - (1) Be better than other people
 - (2) Seek the approval of other people
 - **The issues of identity and comparison**
 - Just think about the wrong relational behaviors those two sinful needs create in us
 - They are dealt with by grasping and applying the truth of the Gospel
 - They are never dealt with by the effort to "be a better/good Christian"
- To the one **enslaved by needing to perform well**, the Gospel says you have/can not impress God!
- To the one who is enslaved by the **need for approval** it says, you have all the approval possible in God!
 - For both, they are freed from drawing their **identity from performance**
 - Which, whether we perform well or poorly, is destructive

"The gospel of justifying faith means that while Christians are, in themselves still sinful and sinning, yet in Christ, in God's sight, they are accepted and righteous. So we can say that we are more wicked than we ever dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we ever dared hope — **at the very same time**." –Tim Keller²

So the whole **motive** and **mode** concerning obedience to the Word changes

- The **motive** is not to earn God's favor but to enjoy God's life (see 3:26-27; 4:6-7)
 - **The rules go from burdensome to beautiful**
- The **mode** is not to try harder but rather be transformed (see 5:16-25)
 - **The Gospel transforms us by the power of the Holy Spirit!**
 - **Galatians will argue that**

Galatians is deeply concerned that we learn to apply the Gospel to our daily lives

- To be **accepted by God through Christ** and then to feel that we can earn God's **acceptance through works** is to **distort** the **Good News** and **desert God**