

New Series...

- Last week we covered **1:1-9 (Get that message for context)**
- We are going to work our way through the text today (**1:10-2:10**)—a little tedious
- Prayer
- **Jacuzzi story... God is not like that. His mercies are new every morning**

The issue we are discussing is that the Christian life is lived out by daily **thinking on** and **applying the Gospel to** situations, relationships and ourselves

- The Gospel being the good news that...
- **The Gospel is not GOOD ADVICE to men but GOOD NEWS about Christ; not an invitation TO DO, but a declaration of what God HAS DONE**

The topic surfaces in Galatians because there were those present that were saying otherwise

- I.e. "The Gospel is how the Christian life begins, yes, but it is then matured by **a careful keeping of the rules** in order to keep our favored place before God"

Paul is writing Galatians to **combat that idea** and **defend the truth** that the Gospel is the only way to live life

- In other words, we were **first accepted** by God not because we were good or did good things—in fact the opposite is true
 - **Rather, we are accepted by God because of the thing that Jesus did for us**
- We **continue** to be accepted by God not because we are now good or better or do good things
 - **But rather because of Christ's once and for all finished work that accomplishes our continued acceptance before God in grace once and for all** (Cf. **Romans 5:1**)

The idea that we need to (or somehow can) become "**Good Christians**" is simply not true

- What would constitute a "Good Christian" anyway? (scale—not in Scripture)
- In the context of Galatians it was circumcision and keeping the Law of Moses
- To continue as a Christian and become a "Good Christian" you had to progress in those certain things (they would say)
 - **That idea, in a different way, is appealing to all of us**
 - We sort of naturally think this way, don't we?
 - **Progression and achievement** and always needing to go a **bit further** and do a **bit better** to "**get there**" are common themes in our society

"The entire process (of self-development) can be very exciting and entertaining. But the problem is there's no end to it. The fantasy **is** that if one heads in the right direction and just **works hard enough** to learn new things and **grows enough** and gets actualized one will be **there**. None of us is **quite certain exactly where there** is, but it obviously has something to do with **resting**."¹

What the Gospel tells us—why it is indeed good news—is because it provides a way that we can **rest now!** Makes it that we **have arrived** because of the work of Christ and the **grace of God!**

- This is the idea that Paul is defending as he writes to the Galatians

In attempting to combat this message of extravagant grace, Paul's opponents attacked **his apostleship** and **his Gospel**

¹ Gerald May as quoted in Thomas L. Bodie's, *The Gospel According to John* (New York: Oxford University Press), 60-61.

In the verses we'll look at today Paul is defending both

Concerning his apostleship:

- Apostle in the Jewish understanding of the day was “a special messenger, with a special status, enjoying an authority and a commission that came from a body higher than himself.”²
- In Christian understanding it came to be used to describe the 12 that **Jesus Himself** appointed to represent Him and teach and preach in His name
 - Plus a couple others in the NT (Paul being one)
 - It was a small and unique group of people (Capital 'A')

His opponents' accusations would have been that Paul received his apostleship and message second hand (from the OG Apostles)

- And had since confused the message slightly
 - His opponents are supposedly setting the message right and have greater authority
 - Paul trumps them and says, “I'm straight from Jesus baby!”
 - **Verse 1**
 - Claims that the higher body that authorized him is Christ and the Father themselves!
 - This is going to be paramount in Paul's argument
 - His calling and message are not second hand things that have suffered from a game of telephone and so gotten confused

He then goes on to reinforce how he came about his message

Verse 11-12

- If it were based on **human reasoning** it would have made a way for humans to look better
 - A core component of the Good News is the bad news that we **are really bad** and **do bad**
 - The true Gospel pulls the rug out from underneath us (there are none good!)
- If it were based on **human reasoning** it would have made a way to have both greater and lesser Christians
 - We always create division based on merit and demerit in society (performance)
 - The true Gospel pulls the rug out from underneath us (the ground is level at the Cross)
- If it were based on **human reasoning** we would have created a god that deals more directly and less mercifully with badness
 - Now, if it were merely our own personal god, he would always be merciful and turn a blind eye to sin
 - But the moment we think of others and their sin, and the sin of the seemingly most wicked in society, we invent a god who is always and immediately radically harsh with wickedness
 - **The true Gospel pulls the rug out from underneath us here again**
 - The God of the Bible (and the Gospel of Jesus Christ which is His story) is **the only God man has ever heard of who so fiercely and relentlessly loves sinners**
 - **This is His singular stance toward us!**
 - False gods—the kind people invent—despise sinners
 - **The Gospel is good news for everyone!**

² Cole as quoted in John Stott, *The Message of Galatians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1968), 13.

In the classic book *Crime and Punishment* Fyodor Dostoyevsky captured the crazy, scandalous **idea of grace** this way:

At the last Judgment Christ will say to us, "Come, you also! Come, drunkards! Come, weaklings! Come, children of shame!" And he will say to us, "Vile beings, you who are in the image of the beast and bear his mark, but come all the same you as well." And the wise and the prudent will say, "Lord, why do you welcome them?" And he will say: "If I welcome them, you wise men, if I welcome them, you prudent men, it is because not one of them has ever been judged worthy." And he will stretch out his arms, and we will fall at his feet, and we will cry out sobbing, and then we will understand all, we will understand the gospel of grace! Lord, your Kingdom come!³

You see, if the Gospel were based on **human reasoning** it would be way more **complicated** than merely trusting in what Jesus has done for us

- We would do away with **death-bed conversions** and total pardon for the **worst in human history**
- We would demand a justice **other than the justice met at the cross**—at least for everyone other than ourselves

The true Gospel seems way too easy!

- And that was another accusation against Paul and his message...

...That Paul was trying to make the message more **palatable** to people

- It seems they thought that Paul's failure to force gentiles to be circumcised and keep the Law of Moses was just a ploy to **please them**
 - **We can understand why they may accuse him of this—because we all do this**
 - **In an effort to be liked we will often compromise on hard truth**
- But Paul is making it clear that this is not how he operates
 - **Verse 10**
 - Verses 8 and 9 make it clear that his desire is not to please people or be soft on the truth
 - **Because he knows that it is only the truth and power of the Gospel that changes people!**

Paul's story is that the Gospel had radically changed him!

Verses 13-14

- **Paul was a paradox—an extremely committed, moral, religious... murderer**
 - Paul was dramatically transformed!
- **No man made message does that!**
 - **Especially not a message that was just a spin on what he had already mastered (Cf. v. 14)**
- The Gospel is absurd if it only means that the sufferings and resurrection of Christ were to make us **better**, more **moral, well behaved** people
 - The Cross and Resurrection make us **brand new people!**
 - Paul was a brand new person
- What Paul experienced was radical grace... and he knew this
 - When he encountered Jesus, he was on his way to persecute (violently) the Church in Damascus
 - Jesus took this personally
 - **Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me? I am Jesus whom you are persecuting..." (Acts 9:4,5)**

³ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Crime and Punishment*, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Random House, 1950), 322.

- Here is grace!
 - That the Lord, who Paul was violently opposed to and whose mission he sought to destroy, comes to him and saves him in love!
 - **This is grace!**
 - When everything in us and our actions would say we deserve **bad** and **punishment** and **alienation** and are then treated with **goodness, kindness, and favor** and brought into **loving relationship!**

- This is the polar opposite of what religion (rule keeping) does
 - Paul had already mastered that as much as possible (Cf. v. 14)
 - He knew it was folly

- Our experience (and Scripture) tell us that our efforts to be better are unsustainable
 - We eventually find ourselves worn out and disillusioned by our “**huffing and puffing to impress God, our scrambling for brownie points and our thrashing about trying to fix ourselves**”⁴

 - “We believe that we can pull ourselves up by our bootstraps... Sooner or later we are confronted with the painful truth of our inadequacy and insufficiency. Our security is shattered and our bootstraps are cut. Once the fervor has passed, weakness and infidelity appear. We discover our inability to add even a single inch to our spiritual stature. There begins a long winter of discontent that eventually flowers into gloom, pessimism, and a subtle despair—subtle because it goes unrecognized, unnoticed, and therefore unchallenged. It takes the form of boredom, drudgery. We are overcome by the ordinariness of life, by daily duties done over and over and over again. We secretly admit that the call of Jesus is too demanding, that surrender to the Holy Spirit is beyond our reach. We start acting like everyone else. Life takes on a joyless, empty quality.”⁵

 - This is the predicament of every Christian who tries to continue in self-effort and self-improvement instead of Gospel transformation
 - “Life takes on a joyless, empty quality”
 - **Paul’s life was not like that—he was amazed!**
 - 1 Timothy 1:12-14

12 **I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength to do his work. He considered me trustworthy and appointed me to serve him,**

13 **even though I used to blaspheme the name of Christ. In my insolence, I persecuted his people. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief.**

14 **Oh, how generous and gracious our Lord was! He filled me with the faith and love that come from Christ Jesus.**

 - Paul saw his place in life as a gift
 - **Verses 15-16a**
 - That is what grace does! It proclaims the awesome truth that all is a gift!
 - **Because the Gospel is not GOOD ADVICE to men but GOOD NEWS about Christ; not an invitation TO DO, but a declaration of what God HAS DONE**
 - And we see this truth **in each other** when we live out the Gospel, and we rejoice!
 - And we know it is truth!
 - **Paul knew this was truth from God and did not get it second and then distort it as accused**
 - **Verses 16b-24**

⁴ Brennan Manning, *Ragamuffin Gospel* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 1990), 18.

⁵ *Ibid.* 17-18.

Now Paul further defends the message of this marvelous gospel he preached

Verses 2:1-3

- Paul was lead by the Lord to Jerusalem where those who had been with Jesus the most **confirmed that the message** Paul was preaching was indeed the true and whole Good News from and about Jesus Christ!
 - Those, who knew the Lord personally, did not try to get the gentile who was with Paul to be circumcised!
 - Proving that that was not part of the Gospel!!
- **Verses 4-5** = it wasn't even an issue except for some others who wanted to put a yoke on them, which would have been **slavery**. But they all were **faithful** to the message

Paul was faithful to the Gospel of grace

- Which meant to realize that God does not deal with us according to outward ritual and personal effort
- **When we disobey, the gospel brings comfort by reminding us that God's approval doesn't depend on our obedience but Christ's obedience for us**
- If we fall into performance, even at the pressure of other believers, we **deny the love of God** as revealed in the Gospel
- Cf. Galatians 1:6
I am shocked that you are **turning away so soon from God**, who called you to himself through **the loving mercy of Christ**. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News

"If we continue to picture God as a small-minded bookkeeper, a niggling customs officer rifling through our moral suitcase, as a policeman with a club who is going to bat us over the head every time we stumble and fall, or as a whimsical, capricious, cantankerous thief who delights in raining on our parade and stealing our joy, **we flatly deny** what John writes in his first letter (4:16)—'God is love.'"⁶

Verses 2:6-10

- Paul's message was complete and consistent with what the original Apostles knew!
- They had nothing to add to it!
- You think **Peter** was going to add something about being good!?? (Denied 3 times)
 - That **having seen** what Christ did for us on the cross, Peter was now going to add to the message that we actually need to do things for God??

Peter and Paul had both been in a lifestyle and system that demanded better performance—now, they had been saved out of that!

- **They knew that the point of the Cross—and the power of the Holy Spirit—was not merely to make us better—but to make is new!**
- New and clean and accepted once and for all by grace—because of what Jesus has done for us!

⁶ Brennan Manning, *The Furious Longing of God* (Colorado Springs, Co: David C. Cook, 2009), 77.
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