

## “Paul’s Pastoral Side”

Galatians 1:6-10

<sup>6</sup> 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—<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (ESV)

The way I ended up in ministry wasn't by accident. An elder hired me to be on church staff without asking the permission of the senior pastor. There was a reason I guess he thought he had to do that. It ended up being one of the greatest blessings of our life. When Judy and I lived in Orlando, I was a singles pastor at Orangewood Presbyterian Church. One of the great things about being a singles pastor or being in student ministries is that years later, people often call you and say, “Can you perform our wedding ceremony?” I've loved doing weddings, especially weddings of people I love. So, when Judy and I were in Atlanta—I was a pastor there—I got a phone call from a dear girl from our singles ministry. She said, “Can you come down and do the wedding?” I said, “I'd love to.” She said, “Now, it's going to be big. There might be up to 1,000 people at this wedding.” It was so big they had to rent one of the downtown churches, and they wanted it to be very beautiful as well. So, they rented this huge downtown church in Orlando. I flew from Atlanta to do this wedding. I met with the couple that evening. On Friday night we did the wedding rehearsal. We went through everything together and we had it down like clockwork, just like you'd want it to be. The next day the wedding was about to happen. I was standing in the back of the church with the bride and the groom, and people were coming in. There were probably 800 people streaming into this place, and the wedding coordinator came up to me and said, “Okay, the pastor is here. You can go now.” I said, “Excuse me?” She said, “According to our bylaws, a minister at this particular church has to actually perform the ceremony.” I said, “You're kidding me, right?” She said, “No, seriously. He's right over there.” I said, “So I came down here to do the wedding, I did the rehearsal, I did everything, and he's just going to come and do the wedding for people he doesn't even know.” She said, “That's right.” I said, “Nah, I don't think so.” By this time the bride is just bawling. I mean, they flew me down to do the wedding and now, right before she is ready to walk down the aisle, somebody says, “This guy over here whom you don't know is going to actually perform the ceremony.” The wedding coordinator was trying to be gracious. She said, “I guess you could read the Bible or something.” I looked at the pastor and said, “Are you going to help me out here?” He just said, “Hey, you know – can't do anything. It's the rules.” I was just flabbergasted. Finally I thought, “I know what I'll do. We're all Christians here. I'll appeal to the gospel.” I said, “You know, there's a big mistake here. They didn't know this. They came here in good faith. It seems like the gospel would enable you to show them a little grace.” The lady at that point transformed into Linda Blair [*the actress who played the role of a demon possessed child in “The Exorcist”*] and she said, “THIS ISN'T ABOUT THE GOSPEL! THIS IS ABOUT FOLLOWING THE RULES!” At that point I knew I was going to have to sort of go covert. I knew I was going to have to go black-ops on her, because what was I supposed to do now? I looked at the pastor and I said, “I'll fight you for it.” He said, “You're kidding?” I said, “No, I'm not. I'm going out to do that wedding and I dare you to try and stop me.” I did the wedding and it was beautiful.

The point is as we look at the Book of Galatians, the Book of Galatians is addressed to Pharisees. One of the things you'll hear from the mouth of a Pharisee pretty often is this, “It's not about the gospel, it's about following the rules. Sure it's good to trust Jesus and all that stuff is good, but what really matters is following the rules. What really matters is not just trusting in Jesus, but being good, and not even just being good, but being better than good.”

I told you last week that the purpose of the Book of Galatians is really simple. It's two-fold. On one hand Paul's defending his apostleship because people would undermine it because undermining his apostleship would undermine his message. But also he was defending the gospel. In fact he was differentiating Christian righteousness from every other kind of righteousness. Paul told us his gospel in the first couple of verses when he talked about Jesus. He says in verse four, “The Lord Jesus who gave himself for our sins, to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father.” That's it. The gospel is as simple as can be. You and I are sinful, desperately wicked and broken beyond all imagination, and God sent His Son in order to take the punishment we deserve. How do you receive that? By faith alone. That's it! It's scott-free. I don't know any other way to say that. You get it. Apparently, Paul preached that to the Galatians. They came to know Jesus and then someone either from within the church or someone from without but part of the church, came and said to them, “You know, Jesus is good, but if you really want to be complete you should add circumcision. If you really want to be complete, you should add the Old Testament law to it.” They're saying you should trust Jesus (who would argue against that?), but there's more to do. Most Pharisees, almost by definition come from within the church, not from without.

This morning I was reading my minister's prayer book before the first service, and the devotion was from Acts chapter 20. That's where Paul warns the Ephesian elders. He said, “After I leave, people will rise up from within the flock and twist the gospel, and they'll ravage the flock like savage wolves.” He doesn't say, “After I leave you need to keep an eye out on the

city walls for the barbarian hordes who might come in and destroy the church.” Paul says, “You need to keep an eye for the Pharisee who’s inside the church.” On one hand I think, “Man, I’m looking forward to preaching,” but, on the other hand, as I’m studying, I think ‘What did I get myself into?’” You might have caught the irony of the sermon title, “Paul’s Pastoral Side.” If Paul was a pastor in the average evangelical church, he would probably get fired because you’ve got to say what the Bible says.

We’re going to look at three things this morning. We’re going to look at Paul’s astonishment. We’re going to look at Paul’s admonishment, and finally we’re going to look at Paul’s primary intent. What’s Paul’s astonishment here? Notice what he says in verse 6.

<sup>6</sup> *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— (ESV)*

If you remember last week, I said there’s something about Galatians that’s different from all the rest of the letters that Paul wrote. Something is missing. It’s a standard letter that he begins like every other letter in that he starts with the writer, “Paul,” “to the churches in Galatia,” the audience. Then he gives a standard greeting, “Grace and peace to you.” In a normal letter the very next thing he would say is, “I thank God for you.” “I thank God for you for your growth in Christ” or “your faith in Christ.” For the Galatians instead of saying, “Grace and peace to you through God the Father, Amen,” he says, “I’m astonished.” “I’m astonished that you so quickly deserted him who called you in the grace of Christ.” What does he mean when he says, “astonished” here? Is he spanking them or is he not? It’s an interesting word to try and figure out. In the Greek it’s the word, “thaumazo.” Who would define this word or this angst or this attitude the most? It would probably be someone like my mother. What the word is trying to connote is the awkwardness you have when you have a child who’s constantly getting into trouble. You say, “Tommy, don’t touch that stove.” Then five minutes later you hear a blood-curdling scream, you run into the kitchen, Tommy’s hand is just burned to a crisp and you don’t know whether to be angry or to feel sorry for him. My mother spent the first probably seventeen years of my life thinking that. By the time I was thirteen or fourteen years old I’d broken both of my legs, both of my arms, many of my ribs, my bottom teeth, and when I was thirteen I broke my back. I remember the Coast Guard came and got me on one of those cigarette boats and took me out on a backboard while my mom was waiting for me at the docks. They put me in the ambulance and she stared down at me and said, “Tommy, what have you done now?” She was crying and her heart hurt for me because I was paralyzed at the time. On the other hand I know she was frustrated because every time I turned around she had to take this kid to the emergency room. That’s what Paul’s talking about when he says, “astonished.” It’s the kind of word that a parent would use. He’s not saying, “I’m angry at you.” He’s not spanking them. Just to draw a differentiation, in the Book of Galatians he says really hard things like, “I wish those who preached circumcision would just go all the way.” When he says things like that he’s talking about the false teachers. When he’s talking about his sheep he’s quite different. So when he says “astonished” he is certainly frustrated on one hand, but on the other hand he’s also communicating to them some compassion: “I just can’t believe it how quickly you’ve deserted Christ.” He means either quickly after Paul had left them or quickly after their own conversion, but either way Paul is both angered and frustrated and is not sure what to think. But he communicates it by saying, “I am astonished.”

What’s interesting here, and this is what most churches need to know, is Paul is astonished that you’re so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Paul says this and the reason the Book of Galatians is so challenging for a church, especially a church like ours, is the “different gospel” that they are deserting Christ for is not badness. It’s goodness. When we tend to think in our minds about someone deserting Christ or leaving the church we tend to think about someone who’s gone off into some kind of evil debauchery and left their family and committed adultery and are doing all these crazy things. Paul says, “I’m astonished that you’re deserting the grace of Christ. The way the Galatians have deserted the grace of Christ is by trying to add good things to it.” It’s not badness that Paul’s astonished at and it’s not badness that Paul’s frustrated at; it’s goodness that Paul is frustrated at, namely when people say, “It’s Jesus plus something else.” I told you last week that you could summarize the Book of Galatians as, “Jesus plus anything equals nothing.” You receive Jesus by faith alone and nothing else can make you complete. Nothing. People had come along and had begun to add “good things” to that. Just because they’re good things doesn’t mean they are good news. In fact, the thing that’s more apt to separate you from God is not your badness but your goodness because you think, “I sort of understand what’s going on here. I’m okay.” Paul says the false teachers had come in and distorted the gospel that he preached. Let me read to you the next verse. Paul says, “I can’t believe you’re turning to a different gospel” and in verse 7 he says,

<sup>7</sup> *not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. (ESV)*

He says, “There’s a different gospel, not that there is another one. But there are some who come among you teaching a different gospel, and they want to distort the gospel of Christ.” What does he mean by that? The word “distort” in the Greek you could translate as “pervert.” In other words they pervert the gospel of Christ. Really, at the end of the day what it means is to turn something upside down or inside out. It’s interesting to me that what Jesus did is come into the world system that we live in and turned it upside down. Everything about our world pushes us to try for merit. You don’t get into college

because you have bad SAT scores; you get into college if you have good SAT scores. You don't get a raise at work because you have bad performance, you get a raise at work because you have good performance, and on and on and on. Jesus comes into that world and says, "Hey, performance means nothing. I did all the performing for you. It's by grace. You can't work for it. You can't earn it. In fact the worse that you admit that you are, the more you are going to understand what I've done for you." He turns everything we know upside down, and Paul says these false teachers, these legalists that come in, are actually trying to turn back what he already turned upside down once. Jesus flipped over the idea of salvation by merit, and we now have it by grace. They're trying to flip it back, and they just don't get it. Your goodness is more apt to separate you from God than your badness.

I was reminded this week of "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Have you read that book? If you haven't, pick it up and you can read it in an afternoon. It's a great illustration of this whole book of Galatians. Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: most of you are probably familiar with it from Looney Tunes, I'm guessing. Dr. Jekyll is a decent guy, and he realizes he has these evil proclivities and he thinks, "If I can just invent this potion that will free my evil side from my good side, then my good side would be unhampered in order to do good works." Every time he tries to do something good he feels like his evil side is trying to pull him back. Does it sound familiar? It's like Romans chapter 7. So he invents this potion and it works. It separates his natures. His good is able to do good, but he's horrified when he realizes how evil his evil nature really is as he becomes Mr. Hyde. That's what comes out at night. The primary thing that makes Mr. Hyde evil is just how selfish he is. He won't let anything get in his way. What matters is what satisfies him. Dr. Jekyll is so horrified by this, he determines that he's never going to take the potion again, and he's just going to be a good man for the rest of his life. He's going to endeavor to overcome the evil of Hyde by his own goodness. So he does that. He takes on a great mission to feed the poor and to take care of the sick, and all of these things. By the end of the book he's so pleased with himself. He sits down in Regent's Park in London and begins to think to himself what a good person he is. "Look at how much I do for the poor. Look at how much I do for the widow and the orphan. Look at all these good things. Even in spite of Hyde, think how much better I am than all these other people." The moment he voices those thoughts, he looks down and is again horrified because for the first time he is now beginning to change into Mr. Hyde without taking the potion. Stevenson is on to something here. The thing that is most odious in God's sight is not necessarily your badness but it is your goodness. How much of your goodness do you try and present to God and say, "Aren't you impressed with me?"

That's why it's so easy for false teachers to come into the church. Why would it be easy? Why would these guys be so acceptable? Because the false teachers would have provided for the Galatian church just like they provide for the church like ours, something that every human being wants. I brought one with me [he holds up a ruler]. Actually I had a yardstick for the first service. It just didn't feel butch enough, so I went home and got the Stanley "Fat Max." The false teachers provided a ruler. They say, "You want to know how you're doing?" How many people don't want to know how they're doing? How am I doing in my Christian faith? If you ask me I'll say, "I don't know, how are you doing?" You ask the teachers in the Book of Galatians, they hold up the ruler and say, "Here it is. Are you doing good? Are you circumcised? Are you obeying the law? Check yourself out. Are you good enough or not?" It provided a ruler. The problem with that is that they also spend a lot of time comparing themselves to the ruler. Not only do they spend a lot of time comparing themselves to the ruler, because that gets old after awhile, then what they do is start comparing everyone else to the ruler. Someone had a great line after the first service today. He said, "You know when I stand next to that ruler, I can't even see the first line." In other words he didn't match up. He didn't meet the standard. If you say that, you really are starting to get it. You can measure yourself according to a ruler but the only real ruler is Jesus. Unless you're as good as Him you're wasting your time.

Martin Luther has a great comment on these verses. He says, "Why in the world would you think that if God was not willing to forgive you for the sake of Christ's work, why would He ever be willing to forgive you for the sake of yours?" If Jesus' work was not good enough to free you from sin and the tyranny of the devil, what in the world makes you think that your work is good enough? Think about it. That's Paul's astonishment: "I can't believe this." But then he moves from astonishment to admonishment. That's what he says next.

<sup>8</sup> *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.* <sup>9</sup> *As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (ESV)*

The word Paul uses there for "accursed" is "anathema." It means to be devoted to destruction. In other words, there's nothing worse that could happen to you than to be proclaimed to be anathema, or to be accursed. Paul says, "If we or an angel from heaven comes and preaches a different gospel than the one I preached to you, let him be anathema, or accursed, devoted to destruction." In other words, "May he be devoted to hell." Now, think of the standard that Paul has set for himself there. Paul has given himself absolutely no wiggle room whatsoever to change his mind. He doesn't say, "If someone else comes to you and says something different, don't believe him. But if I come in a year or so and say, 'Well, I've been praying about it and I really think it's different.'" Paul says, "If we (that is me and all the apostles with me) or an angel from heaven comes to you and preaches anything different, may they be accursed." Paul is saying, "What I preached to you at the beginning, justification or grace by faith alone, is it and it will never be any different than that. Even if I come and

tell you something different, don't believe me. Or, if an angel from heaven comes and tells you something different, don't believe them." If he had stopped there the false teachers would have said, "Yeah, I agree with that. If Paul changes his mind or an angel comes or anything, we're just trying to help." Paul says, "Or if anyone else comes and says anything different, may he be accursed." Those are hard verses, aren't they? They are for me. One of the great strengths of the EPC, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, is their motto, "Unity in the essentials, Liberty in the non-essentials, and Charity in most things." If you knew the motto you would have laughed because it says, "Charity in all things." What if someone begins to teach different things? At what point do you step in and say, "I don't know about that"? It's easy when you look outside at differing major world religions that have received revelation through angels. Paul says that's a no-go. The problem is when from within the church people begin to teach something different. What do you do then? You see that all the time. You see movements arising up even within Presbyterianism that say, "You know, really what the Book of Galatians is about is not how to be reconciled to God. What it's about is how first century Jews and Gentiles can get together. That's different, I think, than what Paul is saying here. Paul says, "If you say those things and teach those things you are to be accursed." Paul says that. I would be remiss, I don't know if I would even go that far because who am I? But on the other hand, it's something to consider. He admonishes them.

He goes from astonishment to admonishment to his final pastoral intent or his primary intent. The reason it's important is because the other thing that you see here is that Paul apparently, as you go through the Book of Galatians, was accused from time to time of being a people pleaser. I get that all the time [laughing]. Not really. I'm amazed that people would consider Paul a people pleaser, yet he was accused of being a people pleaser. Part of the reason people accused him of being a people pleaser is because of the fact that he didn't require Gentiles to become circumcised in order to come into the community of faith. People who came after Paul said, "You need to get circumcised." They said, "Paul said we don't need to be circumcised." They would say, "Well, you know, Paul's a people pleaser. He just didn't want to offend you." There's nothing more offensive than telling a grown man who's not circumcised that he needed to get circumcised in order to come into the church. Think about it. Paul says to these guys, "If you say anything different than what I've said you're anathema. Now, who's a people pleaser now?" In other words, "Do I sound like a people pleaser when I say that you should be going to hell if you're preaching something different than I preach? I don't think so." He says, "Am I trying to please man? Am I trying to please God? Am I still relying on the works of the law? Absolutely not." Because to be a servant of man is to fail to be a servant of Christ. Paul draws a big distinction here. Notice the last thing he says,

<sup>10</sup> . . . *If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. (ESV)*

One of my teachers, Richard Pratt, used to always say to us in class, "Those who make their living from their faith always risk losing one or the other." What is it that kept Paul from caving? I feel like I'm overwhelmed by pressures sometimes. I can't imagine what the apostle Paul must have felt like. Yet he was able to keep from being a people pleaser. The answer is he believed the same gospel that he preached. There's no magic trick. Paul believed what he preached, and because he believed what he preached he didn't have to worry about getting approval from man. What Paul preached was that when Jesus died for our sins, God took all of our sin and gave Jesus credit for them and took all of Jesus' righteousness and gave us credit for it. In other words, we are completely and utterly acceptable in the sight of God. If we're completely acceptable and completely pleasing to God it really doesn't matter what other people think about us. It might make life hard sometimes—look at the apostle Paul! But at the end of the day what drives you? Is it trying to seek the approval of other people? You see, that's what Pharisees do as well. Not only do you try to see if you're okay with God in the ruler, you ask other people, "How do you think I'm doing? What do you want me to do?" You don't have to do that anymore. If the gospel's true, God is pleased with you not because of what you've done but because of what Christ has done on your behalf. You're free.

Two of my girls and I watched "Gladiator" yesterday. I like watching girly movies like that with my daughters. One thing that hit me as I was watching the movie what hit me was that the ultimate goal of all these Gladiators was to constantly fight in hopes of winning their freedom. It seems like no one ever wins their freedom because even if they earn enough money or winnings, they're still reliant on the grace of their master. It struck me how much we as Christians spend our whole lives like gladiators. We're just fighting to be free. We're just fighting and struggling and thinking, "At some point I'm going to overcome this sin or that sin, and when I do I will finally be free and Hallelujah, praise the Lord!" If you are working like that you're wasting your time because someone already became a gladiator for you. Jesus went into the arena. Jesus actually conquered sin and death by His own death and resurrection, and now Jesus your master proclaims you to be free. That's what the whole Book of Galatians is about. Don't let someone else enslave you, and don't think that you are enslaved now if you've trusted Jesus. Think about that.