

## **Galatians: *No Other Gospel***

**Galatians 1:1-2:14**

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Today we're beginning a six-week study on the New Testament book of Galatians.

Galatians is a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to a cluster of 1<sup>st</sup> Century churches located in small towns in what we know today as Central Turkey. These towns—Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, located in Southern Galatia—are mentioned in the book of Acts as stopping points on Paul's missionary journeys. While we don't know the exact date Paul wrote Galatians, many Biblical scholars believe this letter is the earliest writing in our New Testament, written in the late 40s to early 50s, which would place it within 10–15 years of Jesus' death and resurrection.

We've titled this series "No Other Gospel" because in this letter, the Apostle Paul is intent on explaining what the Gospel is and probably even more importantly what it's not. The term "gospel" is bandied about a lot in Christian circles. The word literally means "good news," but what does the good news consist of? How would you define the term gospel? I've heard people try to justify many beliefs as critically important by including them in their definition of the gospel, but the New Testament's definition is much more concise.

The Apostle Paul frequently referred to the gospel in his letters. One of his best-known references is found in Romans 1:16, where he wrote, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile." In that verse, Paul states his commitment to the gospel, but his most comprehensive definition of this important word is found in his introduction to his letter to the Romans, verses 1–5 of chapter 1, where he writes,

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—<sup>2</sup> the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures<sup>3</sup> regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,<sup>4</sup> and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>5</sup> Through him we received grace and apostleship

to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name's sake. –  
Romans 1:1-5

In these verses, Paul emphasizes the following details about the gospel:

- The gospel was promised through the prophets in the Old Testament.
- Jesus, God's Son, is central to the gospel.
- Jesus was raised by God's power from death.
- Through the power that resurrected Jesus, God calls all people to obedience through faith in Jesus' name.

The simplicity and brevity of Paul's definition is important because Paul emphasizes throughout this letter that the Gospel of Jesus stands alone and can't be added to. In fact, he goes so far as to claim that if we try to add anything to the gospel, it's no longer the gospel of Jesus Christ. Our title, "No Other Gospel," isn't a clever title; it's the core message of Galatians.

[This video clip from The Bible Project](#) gives us an overview of Galatians.

Scot McKnight, a New Testament scholar I have great appreciation for, places the writing of Galatians prior to Paul's second missionary journey and just before the famous council of Jerusalem that we read about in Acts chapter 15. The Jerusalem Council convened apostles and early church leaders to decide what parts of the Jewish Law Gentile converts to Christianity needed to follow. Specifically, did Gentile males needed to be circumcised to be saved? In other words, was following the Jewish Law part of the gospel?

I'll provide some additional background as we go along, but let's look at the text for today: Galatians 1 and the first 14 verses of chapter 2. I'll read sections of this passage and add some commentary as we move along:

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers and sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia:

<sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:1-5)

These verses provide us with a typical introduction from the Apostle Paul. Look at Paul's opening phrase: "Paul an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Paul wanted his readers to understand he was a messenger (that's what apostle means) sent from God and his message wasn't his own: it had been given to him by God. In other words, Paul wanted to ensure people would understand the gospel he preached didn't originate with him; it came from God. I'll pick up reading at verse 6:

<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— <sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! <sup>9</sup> As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

<sup>10</sup> Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

<sup>11</sup> I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. <sup>12</sup> I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:6-12)

Paul wastes no time in getting to the point. He's concerned that followers of Jesus in Galatia have deserted the true gospel of Jesus and instead are adopting a compromised version of the gospel. The word gospel appears five times in the four verses I just read and 10 times in today's passage.

Paul doesn't go into much detail in our text today about how the Gospel is being compromised—Pastor Evan will dive more into that next week—but he demonstrates how serious his concern is by his use of words and phrases like “deserting,” “turning to a different gospel,” “perverting the gospel of Christ,” and “anyone—even an angel—who preaches a different gospel is cursed.” Paul's concern in this letter isn't a trivial, philosophical matter; it's of the utmost importance. I'll begin reading again at verse 13.

<sup>13</sup> For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. <sup>14</sup> I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. <sup>15</sup> But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased <sup>16</sup> to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. <sup>17</sup> I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

<sup>18</sup> Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. <sup>19</sup> I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother. <sup>20</sup> I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie.

<sup>21</sup> Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. <sup>22</sup> I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. <sup>23</sup> They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” <sup>24</sup> And they praised God because of me.

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. <sup>3</sup> Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup> We did

not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

<sup>6</sup> As for those who were held in high esteem—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message. <sup>7</sup> On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. <sup>8</sup> For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. <sup>9</sup> James, Cephas and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. <sup>10</sup> All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along. (Galatians 1:13-2:10)

That passage provides us with some of the most extensive autobiographical material we have about the Apostle Paul. His recounting of his personal journey is provided to help his readers understand why he is so adamant about the makeup of the gospel. Paul tells us he was progressing in Judaism beyond many of his peers, and he was zealous for the Jewish traditions. We learn elsewhere that his father was a Pharisee, and Paul (then known as Saul) was mentored by the famous Pharisee Gamaliel. Saul was such a zealot that prior to Jesus revealing Himself to him, Paul was intent on stamping out Christianity, which he viewed as a threat to Judaism, by imprisoning and executing Christians. When Stephen, the first Christian martyr, was stoned, Paul watched over the cloaks of those doing the stoning and gave approval to Stephen's death.

Some of the details of Paul's life between his conversion and his missionary journeys are unclear, but we learn here that three years after his conversion, Paul went to Jerusalem to meet Peter (called Cephas here) over the course of 15 days. He then traveled to Cyria and Silicia, and for the next 14 years, we know little of Paul's whereabouts. He does tell us elsewhere that he spent considerable time in the desert of Arabia, where Jesus appeared to

him in a supernatural way and revealed truth to Paul, which he preached and wrote about in his letters.

Paul is so intent on helping his readers understand that he only talked with Peter during this time, because he wants them to realize that the gospel truth he preached came directly from Jesus. It wasn't taught to him by any person. Seventeen years after his conversion on the Damascus Road when Jesus miraculously appeared to him, Paul went to Jerusalem to meet with church leaders to make sure the gospel he had been taught and was preaching was consistent with what they understood based on what they had heard Jesus Himself preach.

It was apparently in Jerusalem that Paul was confronted for the first time with people he calls Judaizers, who were demanding that to be truly saved by Jesus, Gentiles needed to follow the Jewish Law—including males being circumcised. It was in Jerusalem that the apostles and other church leaders agreed that they would continue focusing on sharing the gospel with Jews, and Paul and Barnabas would preach the gospel to Gentiles.

Now I'll read to the end of today's passage, starting with verse 11 where we read about conflict between Paul and Peter.

<sup>11</sup> When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

<sup>14</sup> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? (Galatians 2:11-14)

While Peter had seen God's undeniable work among the Gentiles—you might recall that in Acts 10, God gave Peter a vision in which He instructed him not to call food unclean that God viewed as clean—when he was around Jewish Christians who believed Gentiles needed to follow the Mosaic Law to be saved, he distanced himself from eating with the Gentiles and

hung out with the Jews. Paul saw the issue of what Gentiles needed to do to be followers of Jesus as so important that he confronted Peter to his face in front of everyone with the words, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?” Paul shared this conflict with Peter to help his readers understand just how important the sanctity of the gospel was.

Since I’ve followed Paul’s line of reasoning in chapter 1 and the first part of chapter 2, today’s message was basically an introduction to the Book of Galatians. I’ve mentioned the Gospel and defined it, but we haven’t really gotten into what the problem in Galatia was and how that pertains to our lives today. I want to try and do that briefly without stepping on Evan’s toes as he preached on the rest of chapter 2 and part of chapter 3 next week.

Paul’s insistence of the gospel message being only about Jesus Christ and him crucified—a phrase he uses in I Corinthians 2:2—was based on his belief that if we add to the gospel of Jesus, we’re essentially left with no gospel. Someone has said, “Jesus + anything = nothing” and “Jesus + nothing = everything.” For Jewish Christians, the issue of circumcision and following the Jewish Law was really an identity issue. They couldn’t envision themselves as anything but Jews. That’s why throughout Galatians, Paul reiterates that anyone and everyone can be a follower of Jesus. He states this clear in Galatians 3:26–28 when he writes, “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ Jesus have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” We’ll unpack this more fully as we move through Galatians, but for our purposes today, I invite you to consider these questions:

- Is being a follower of Jesus my primary identity?
- Do I prioritize my identity as a Christ follower above everything else (family name, nationality, occupation, political party, or any other group or title I identify with)?

During the last election cycle, I heard a prominent Christian claim that in many cases, those who identified themselves as followers of Jesus seemed to be shaped more by their political party affiliation than by their baptism into Jesus’ family.

- Is there anything in my life, beyond my faith and trust in Jesus, that I look to for assurance of my salvation (e.g., good works I do; being nice to others; spiritual practices like prayer, Scripture reading, being baptized, etc.)?

We'll look at these more closely in the weeks ahead as we continue our walk through Galatians, but I encourage each of us to allow the Holy Spirit to search our hearts and minds this morning.