

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON FOUR)

“ANOTHER GOSPEL”

GALATIANS 1:6-7

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel—

7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.

In verse **6** Paul writes, “*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel.*”

In this verse we have the first of Paul’s exclamatory statements in this letter, reflecting his amazement at the suddenness of the defection on the part of the Galatian believers from the Gospel.

The word “*astonished*” is a translation of the Greek word **thaumazó**: (**thou-mad’-zo**), which means, “to wonder, wonder at, marvel.” It denotes surprise at the unexpected. Paul considered the defection of the Galatian believers to be an extraordinary thing. He had not expected it.

The noted Greek New Testament scholar **Henry Alford** explains that **thaumazó** is a mild word in the sense that it indicates that something better was expected of the Galatians by the apostle. We may say that Paul felt terribly “let down.” The word is in the **present tense** indicating that Paul was continually experiencing both amazement and sorrow

because of the desertion of his beloved converts from the truth of the Gospel.

The Greek word translated “*deserting*” is **metatithemi**: (**met-at-ith’-ay-mee**), which means, “to transpose two things, one of which is put in the place of the other.” The word refers to a transfer of allegiance. In classical Greek it was used of a traitor. The word is used of one altering his opinion or becoming of another mind. It was also used of desertion or revolt, frequently of a change in religion, philosophy, or morals. The **present** tense indicates that when Paul wrote the letter, the defection of the Galatian believers was in progress. If he had used the **perfect tense** instead of the **present tense**, that would have indicated that the Galatians had actually and finally turned against grace and had come to a settled attitude in the matter. It would have meant that they had abandoned Gospel liberty for legalism!

As Paul writes, his mind wavers between fear and hope as to the outcome. Paul was trying desperately to arrest the progress of this new doctrinal infection if he could, which was why he hastened to send the letter on its way. The **Judaizers** had not yet achieved any decisive success, although the Galatian believers were allowing themselves to be persuaded by them. They were in the process of deserting and they were doing so “*quickly*.”

The word “*quickly*” is the translation of a Greek word which means “readily, rashly, quickly.” Paul uses it here to speak of the suddenness and rapidity with which the Galatians were turning away from him and his doctrine of grace, to the **Judaizers** and their doctrine of works. The addition of the word “*so*,” further emphasizes Paul’s astonishment at the speed of their desertion from the authentic Gospel to a counterfeit one!

While it is true that the **Judaizers** were to be blamed for promoting the desertion of the Galatians, the believers were also at fault. They had sat at the feet, as it were of the apostle Paul, the greatest teacher in the history of the Church other than the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Gospel of grace with all its life-transforming implications had been explained to

them over and over again. They could not plead ignorance. They should have refused to listen to the false teachers and they should have rebuked them for their erroneous doctrine! Unfortunately, doctrinal error is still rampant in churches today and genuine believers are still allowing themselves to be led astray by slick presentations made by false prophets who claim to believe the truth.

Brothers and sisters, the defection of the Galatian believers is a lesson for all of us. We may know the truth but unless we make a firm decision to stand on the truth, we make ourselves vulnerable to false teaching.

But the Galatian converts were not merely turning away from the Gospel of grace that they had learned from Paul. They were turning away from God Himself! Paul writes, *“I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the **one** who called you by the grace of Christ.”*

Brothers and sisters, it is critical that we understand that to turn away from the true gospel is also to turn away from the God of the Gospel. In turning away from God, these believers were turning away from the **Person** and **Work** of Christ! Christianity is not just a truth to be learned. Christianity is a person to be experienced. As the American theologian and pastor **James Montgomery Boice** remarked, “Embracing legalism means rejecting God, according to Paul’s reasoning, because it means substituting man for God in one’s life. It is significant that once again even in the space of a few words (*‘who called you by the grace of Christ’*) Paul reiterates the true nature of the gospel: (1) it is of God, for God does the calling, and (2) it is of grace rather than of merit.”

The Christian life is a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ. A person does not become a Christian merely by agreeing to a set of doctrines; he or she becomes a Christian by submitting to the Lordship of Christ and trusting Him. We cannot mix grace and works, because the one excludes the other. Salvation is the gift of God’s grace, purchased for us by Jesus Christ on the Cross. To turn from grace to works is to desert the God who saved us. The Galatians were abandoning not only

the authentic Gospel, but more importantly “*the One*” who had called them by means of the very same Gospel of grace that they were turning away from!

The Greek word translated “*called*” is **kaleo**: (**kal-eh’-o**). The Greek New Testament scholar **Kenneth Wuest**, commenting on this word and its use in this particular verse, made the following observations:

“Its distinctive use in the New Testament is to call a person for a definite purpose. Hence, it is synonymous with to select or choose. It refers to the act of calling someone so that he may hear, come, and do that which is incumbent upon him. It thus is a word that becomes a technical term for special relationships. In secular Greek it was used of a summons in the law courts. It denotes in the New Testament a call from God or in God’s Name, a call to participate in the revelation of grace. Paul’s use of the word in general suggests that he thought of those only as called who obeyed the divine summons. **Of a rejected call he never speaks.** The word grace is in the locative of sphere. God called the Galatians in the sphere of grace. That is, when He effectually summoned them to a participation in the salvation procured by His Son on the Cross, it was on a basis, not of works, but of a salvation unmerited by them and freely bestowed, offered out of the pure generosity and love of the heart of God, with no strings tied to it, offered as a free gift to be accepted by the outstretched hand of faith. This put the Galatians in a position in relationship to God in which they were the objects of His everlasting favor...The Galatians were abandoning the position of grace, the relation toward God which made them the objects of the grace of Christ and participants in its benefits, to put themselves under law which could only award them their sad desserts.”

The fact that Paul uses the word **kaleo** in reference to the Galatian believers, indicates that he considered them genuine believers despite their desertion!

William Hendriksen notes that, "The call to which reference is made, is here, as everywhere in Paul, the internal or effectual calling: that act of the Holy Spirit whereby he savingly applies the gospel-invitation to the heart and life of certain definite individuals among all of those to whom, in the course of history, that invitation is extended. It is a call to salvation, full and free, via the avenue of sanctification. Speaking by and large, the apostle is convinced that the Galatians whom he here addresses had received that effectual call."

The one who had called them in grace was of course God the Father, who chose them in Christ before the foundation of the world, according to **Ephesians 1:3-4**. The Galatians would have been surprised at Paul's accusing them of turning away from God. No doubt they thought that they were pleasing the Father by keeping the law, as did the Jews and Paul himself before his conversion. The Galatian believers were not simply "changing denominations" or "changing assemblies." They were actually abandoning the very grace of God! To make matters worse, they were deserting the very God of grace! God had called them and saved them, and now they were deserting Him for human leaders who were bringing them into bondage.

John MacArthur summarizes the Galatian situation excellently. He says,

"The Judaizers who plagued the early church claimed to be Christians, and much of their doctrine was orthodox. They must have recognized Jesus as the promised Messiah and even acknowledged the value of His sacrificial death on the cross—otherwise they would never have gotten a hearing in the church. They claimed to believe all the truths that other Christians believed. They did not purport to overtly deny the gospel but to improve it by adding the requirements, ceremonies, and standards of the Old Covenant to the New. But anything added to grace destroys it just as surely as does anything taken from it. When law—even God's own law—is added to His grace, His grace ceases to be

grace (**Romans 11:6**). The most destructive dangers to the church have never been atheism, pagan religions, or cults that openly deny Scripture, but rather supposedly Christian movements that accept so much biblical truth that their unscriptural doctrines seem relatively insignificant and harmless. But a single drop of poison in a large container can make all the water lethal. And a single false idea that in any way undercuts God's grace poisons the whole system of belief."

The Galatian believers were not only abandoning the Gospel of grace and the God of the Gospel of grace, but they were embracing "*a different gospel.*"

The Greek word translated "*different*" is **heteros**: (**het'-er-os**), which means, "another of a different kind." The word sometimes refers, not only to difference in **kind** but also speaks of the fact that the **character** of the thing is evil or bad. In other word, the fact that something differs in kind from something else, makes that thing to be of an evil character. The English word **heterodox** is made up of two Greek words, **heteros** and **doxa**, which means "opinion." **Heterodox** refers to that which is contrary to, or different from, an acknowledged standard, a traditional form, or an established religion. It is the opposite of **orthodox** which means, "following or conforming to the traditional or generally accepted rules or beliefs of a religion, philosophy, or practice.

Paul's doctrine of grace is God's truth; it is **orthodox**. Anything that differs in kind from it must necessarily be **heterodox**- a different and false doctrine.

When Paul speaks of the Galatians turning to a **heteros** gospel, he means that they are turning to a "gospel" that is false in its doctrine. It is not only different in character from the Gospel which he preached to the Galatians, but it is different in a bad sense. It is essentially evil. The **orthodox** Gospel is centered on "*the grace of Christ.*" The **heteros** "gospel" that the Galatian believers were turning to was centered on **works**. It was not "**good news**" but was in fact **bad news!**

Kenneth Wuest makes the following comments regarding the **heteros** (*different*) gospel: "We have here in the expression, **heteros** gospel, a contradiction in terms. Gospel is from **euaggelion** which means good news. There cannot be a **heteros** good news, that is, a message of good news different in kind from that which Paul preached, and different in an evil sense, and yet be a message of good news. A salvation-by-works message is no good news to a lost sinner, first, because the Bible says *'not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us'* (**Titus 3:5**), and second, if salvation would be by good works, one would not know how many good works a person must do to be saved or after being saved, to keep saved. No one could have any assurance of acceptance with God or security in salvation from such preaching. Thus, Paul stamps the message of the **Judaizers** as **heterodoxy**, false doctrine."

Wuest informs us that **Arthur S. Way**, in his translation of **Galatians** renders **heteros** gospel, an "**opposition gospel...an alternative gospel.**" Thus, the Galatians were turning to an "opposition gospel" diametrically opposed to Paul's message of grace, and this opposition gospel was not an alternative one!

Brothers and sisters, any "gospel" that requires an individual to perform any kind of work in order to be saved, or contribute in any way to his or her salvation is a **heteros** gospel and is condemned in Scripture.

We will conclude our Lesson this evening with a quote from Pastor **Brian Bell**: "We don't have a different gospel today...we have 50 of them...We have the **Me** Gospel. The **Money** Gospel. The Gospel of **Do Do Do**. The Gospel of **Anything Goes**. The **Progressive** Gospel (i.e. salvation is a process). The **Pick Yourself Up by Your Boot-Straps** Gospel. **NONE** of Paul's letters start with what we need to do for God. Instead, they always begin with what God has already done. To get this the other way around is to miss the gospel....The gospel focuses on Jesus' performance for us, not our performance for Him.

On what He's done, not on what we can do....And now, because Jesus is Extraordinary, we are free to be ordinary; Because Jesus is Someone, we are free to be no-one."