

No Other Gospel
Galatians 1:6-11

Paul begins with a rebuke right off the bat. He skips the typical thanksgiving of his other letters and heads straight for the issue at hand. This illustrates Paul's sense of urgency and concern. He is "astonished" because the Galatians are deserting the true gospel for a false gospel. He is angry because false teachers have crept in and are perverting the gospel of Jesus. He writes, "Let them be accursed" (v. 8). The Greek word is *anathema* and is the word used to translate the Hebrew word for something under the "ban" or "devoted" to the Lord in the Old Testament (Lev. 27:28-29; Deut. 7:26; 13:17; Josh. 6:17-18; 7:11-13, 15). Anything devoted to God in this way had to be completely destroyed. Consider what happened to Achan and his family when he stole some of the devoted things and hid them in his tent (Josh. 6 and 7). He and his whole family were destroyed!

This is serious business!

These false teachers were perverting the gospel and incurring condemnation on themselves. (See what the Bible says about false prophets and false teachers, prophets, or apostles: Deut. 13; 18:20-22; Jer. 23; 2 Cor. 11).

Identifying False Teachers

Unfortunately false teachers don't wear T-shirts or name tags that say, "Hello, I'm a False Teacher." They don't have horns and pointy tails, nor do they all wear white polyester suits and patent leather shoes while sporting a funny hairdo and talking in pseudo-religious language. They are often some of the nicest people you'll ever meet, say they love God, and appear very sincere in their concerns. Remember, Satan disguises himself as an angel of light! (2 Cor. 11:14-15).

1. They contradict the Bible.
2. They add to the gospel. You need to trust Jesus and also do this.

3. They insist on their interpretative framework. Read the Bible through this book; i.e. the Book of Mormon, etc.
4. They claim superior authority or extra revelation. We know better than Paul, Peter, and the other apostles, or I am an apostle. Remember, the apostles were appointed directly by Jesus while on earth (with only one exception, Paul, whose appointment by the resurrected Jesus was witnessed by others).
5. They seek glory for themselves and not for Jesus.
6. They detract from the preeminence of Jesus. Jesus was a good man, a great teacher, but he was not God.

What was the problem?

The false teachers were adding to the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Jesus alone. They were insisting that Gentile believers must also be circumcised and follow Jewish customs in order to be true Christians. Since Martin Luther, most interpreters have seen the problem in Galatia as works righteousness vs. justification by faith or legalism vs. grace. Galatians does speak to these issues and they lie at the heart of the letter. The problem, however, is that we often define legalism so narrowly that we can't find any real proponents, today. I don't know many preachers, denominations, or movements (other than some cults) that overtly teach works righteousness the way the Roman Catholic Church of Luther and Calvin's day did.

What we have today is something more closely related to what was happening in Paul's day in the Galatian churches. These Judaizers (as they are called) were asserting cultural superiority over the Gentiles. Philip McKnight's definition of the legalism in Galatians is helpful,

"Legalism, according to Galatians, was a religious system that combined Christianity with Mosaism in a way that demanded total commitment according to Paul, was a subversion of the adequacy of Christ's work and abandonment of the Holy Spirit as God's way of guiding Christian ethics. In other words, the legalism of the Judaizers is more than a problem: it

has become a new message, a different gospel”¹

The point is that legalism is not just the application of rules to the Christian life. Paul would not have any issue with Christians living by moral and ethical standards; he insisted on it. (see Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 4:17-5:21). The problem is when we insist on a particular cultural manifestation of faith in Jesus as the only way one can live for Jesus. In these cases, the false teachers go beyond the Bible and teach what the Bible does not: you must dress a certain way, avoid certain places, watch only these programs, read only these books, etc. We see this in our day when churches insist that their 1950's expression of Christianity is the only valid expression. They make the gospel more about their culture (and their personal preferences) than about Jesus. We need to guard ourselves against such tendencies or we will fail to reach our contemporary generation for the Jesus. A 1950's church cannot speak to the long-haired, reefer smelling, Hippie Jesus freak of the 60's and 70's even though they all believe in Jesus. The problem has nothing to with the gospel of Jesus but the gospel of culture. We must be sure that we are preaching Jesus because Jesus is the only one who saves.

¹Philip McKnight, *Galatians*. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 23.