

Shepherds' Conference
Tuesday, February 28, 2017, 1:30 p.m.
Keith and Kristyn Getty led music

Phil Johnson

No Other Gospel: The True Gospel of Christ
Galatians 1:6-7

Paul was the spiritual father of the Galatian churches; but the tone is not warm and friendly, but is more cold and scolding (see vv. 6-10). Paul is writing to confront a threat from false teachers.

The issue at stake was justification by faith. Paul always taught that justification was always and only by faith (cf. Rom. 4:5, 11-12). The false teachers were asserting that Paul was only giving part of the message. Acts 15 describes the same false doctrine. The men behind the false teaching were Pharisees (cf. Acts 15:1, 5). This was a pervasive error — true Christianity must be thoroughly Jewish (they were called Judaizers). Paul says their version of the gospel was not really the gospel. It was another gospel — which was not really another.

Paul was asserting that the Galatians were flirting with a whole other kind of gospel. Paul uses severe and righteous language (cf. vv. 8-9). The “curse” is the strongest kind of language Paul used anywhere and Paul uses it at the *beginning* of this epistle.

What should we learn from these maledictions? These curses are God-breathed; it is to show us what a profound evil it is to go beyond what is written in Scripture. Paul does not try to make nice with these men. He does not feign congeniality. He doesn't challenge them to a debate. He simply brushes them off as utter heretics and instructs the Galatians to have nothing to do with them. We are not to have anything to do with anyone who comes teaching another gospel.

It is not always right to be warm and welcoming. But it's also not a badge of honor to be a full-time contrarian. That's not a godly trait. We are to do good to our enemies, etc. (cf. Rom. 12; 1 Pt. 3:9).

By flirting with this alternative gospel, the Galatians were flirting with heresy. So Paul here defends the message of the gospel. It would have been positively sinful to defend these false teachers. Cf. also Tt. 1, where Paul calls these same teachers “of the circumcision” — and that their mouths must be stopped.

We desperately need a generation of men of the spirit of Luther and Calvin who are not afraid to wage a war against false gospels.

There is no way to see the cross as anything but offensive; we cannot preach the gospel without offending some hearers.

Most false teachers are deceived and self-deceived before they become false teachers and deceivers of others. Some in this room might be among those whom Paul condemns as false teachers of the gospel. Lots of people in evangelical churches are doing that.

Cf. 1 Thess. 2:4 — we are to work to please the Lord. If your aim is to be stylish with the world, you have already compromised the gospel — you're preaching yourself rather than Christ Jesus as Lord. The gospel is dramatically unsophisticated. Try to spice it up or tone it down and you will corrupt it.

Marks of a corrupted gospel that entice pastors to go astray —

1. An Itch for Something New

The people we minister to are far too easily corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. There is much pressure from within the church today to follow the fads of the culture. Whatever is currently in fashion will soon go out of fashion.

Running after every new evangelical phase will not make you relevant; it will soon make you irrelevant. “That which is true is not new and that which is new is not true.” That’s Paul’s point about the gospel — “I am astonished you are so quickly deserting...” When Paul says “As I have said before,” he means that he has already warned them about listening to those who come teaching a different message. This is a common tendency. It requires firm determination to remain steadfast and immovable.

We’re like the people of Athens listening to that which is new (Acts 17). The unchanging gospel is the antidote; there is only one gospel and it cannot be improved.

2. An Urge to Modify (v. 7)

These wanted to wrench the gospel out of shape. They were not knowingly working to conspire with Satan against Christ; but in their self-deceived minds, they probably believed they were improving the gospel. Their problem was not that they had an itch for something new; they wanted to preserve elements of the old covenant that were coming to an end and modify it to make it palatable to their own scholars. These were former Pharisees and they wanted to devise a religion congenial to human pride that would be accepted by their theologians and scholars.

3. A Craving for the Applause of Men (v. 10)

The longing for the glory that comes from men than the glory that comes from God. And there is no greater impediment to faith (cf. Luke 16:15).

You cannot faithfully communicate the gospel if you mince words; you are not preaching the true gospel at all if you have modified the gospel. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:22-23. Rather than catering to their Jewish desires he gave them a stumbling block. Paul did not have a perverse agenda to frustrate his listeners; it was God’s choice so that no man would boast before God. The gospel does not cater itself to human pride. There is only one gospel. We need to guard against any tendency to human pride in relation to the gospel.

