

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Sixth Petition (Part VII)

“Gospel” – when we hear that word we tend to think in terms of an evangelistic message, one that focuses on bringing people to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. But we also need to understand that when the Apostles in the New Testament used the word, they meant *all* the revealed truth about the person and work of Christ (cf. Romans 1:1-6; I Corinthians 15:3-11). “It does not stop at the point of conversion and justification by faith, but embraces every other aspect of salvation, from sanctification to glorification. The gospel’s significance, therefore, does not end the moment the new birth occurs; it applies to the entire Christian experience.”¹ Martin Lloyd-Jones once commented: “I often feel that we are so familiar with the word ‘gospel’ that we fail to realize its deep and tremendous significance.”² Many who claim the Evangelical label today, however, *operate* as if the content and substance of the gospel are incidental. As long as you are zealous in soul winning (it should be noted that cults are also involved in soul-winning) and evangelistic in ministry, what does it matter if the content of the gospel varies from church to church or ministry to ministry? Robert Schuller, famed TV evangelist and Senior Pastor of the now defunct Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove, California, has repeatedly declared: “I don’t think anything has been done in the name of Christ and under the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality, and hence counterproductive to the evangelistic enterprise, than the unchristian, uncouth strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition... classical Reformed theology has erred in its insistence that theology be God-centered, not man-centered.”³ Is Schuller’s understanding of the gospel the correct one? I would answer with a strong negative. How one understands the gospel is critically important. “The gospel is not some trivial and inane topic. It is the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of the souls of men. To hold false views about the gospel is to hold false views about the deepest question of all human-life, the relation of a man to his God.”⁴ It is only in this light that we can understand the unyielding and forceful language that Paul uses in this epistle.

I. PAUL’S ASTONISHMENT

The Apostle could hardly comprehend the attitude of the Galatians. He was astonished (THAUMAZO, a very strong word that expresses not only amazement, but indignation⁵).

A. Where the Galatians had been.

The Apostle was personally responsible for their conversion, but his bewilderment is not over any personal sense of rejection. Notice his words: “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the *one* who called you.” Their defection was, in fact, a defection from God Himself! How could Paul make that assertion? The Galatians were simply adding the keeping of the law of God to their understanding of the gospel. How is that a defection? By transferring their allegiance to a “different gospel” they were demonstrating their defection. They accepted a gospel which took their focus off the cross of Christ and on to something else. The fact that this took place so quickly made it worse.⁶ To turn from Paul’s gospel is to turn from God. He had called them “into the grace of Christ.” This is the operative phrase. God deals with believers in the gospel of Christ, not as they deserve, but on the basis of what Christ has done for them (Acts 20:24).

B. Where the Galatians were going.

Away from God and unto a different Gospel – which, in fact, is no gospel at all! Two different Greek words are used to translate the word *another* in the KJV. HETEROS is the word translated *another* (KJV), *different* (ESV). The words heterosexual or heterodoxy, as you can see, contain this Greek word, and in each case they underscore its root meaning: distinctly different, a difference in kind. The other word translated *another* in the KJV (“which is not another”) is ALLOS. It denotes numerical distinctness and

refers to sameness, i.e., another of the same kind. Thus, what Paul is saying is this: “I am astounded that you are turning so quickly from God to a different kind of Gospel, one that is entirely different in substance, which is not another of the same kind as I preached to you.” NOTE: The *facts* of the Gospel were the same for both the Apostle and the Judaizers. They differed over the *terms* with which salvation was conferred. Paul taught that justification was by faith *alone*, while his opponents said that while faith was necessary, it needed to be supplemented by circumcision and observance of the law. In other words you must finish what Christ has begun; you must finish Christ’s unfinished work.

II. PAUL’S ANALYSIS

The Gospel of the Judaizers has only one aim: to distort or pervert the true Gospel.

A. The Judaizers were troubling the churches.

The verb translated “trouble” (KJV) is rendered “throwing you into confusion” by the NIV. The word is actually the opposite of peace. In other words, the activity of the Judaizers only produced *turbulence* in the churches.

B. They were perverting the gospel.

This was intentional. The message was calculated to do this. This was by design. They themselves *wanted* (THELONTES, present active participle that expresses desire) to create this situation. The word for *pervert*, METASTREPHO means to transfer to a different opinion, hence to change the essential character of a thing.⁷ Grace and works cannot be mixed. The old Puritan master William Perkins long ago correctly noted, “Here it must be observed, that they which make an union of grace and works in the cause of justification, are separated from the grace of God. Grace admits no partner, or fellow. Grace must be freely given every way, or it is no way grace.”⁸ Whenever the *content* of the *terms* of the gospel are altered, it is *corrupted*. The message of the cross was diluted of its real character by the Judaizers.

III. PAUL’S RESPONSE

What is the Apostle’s reaction to these things? Does he say, as so many say today, “Well, good men differ on these matters and, please, let us not argue. The Judaizers are sincere. They are evangelistic. They want to see people come to Christ.”

A. His indignation.

Astonishment gives way to Apostolic anger, and (mark this well), his strong language of verses 8 and 9 reveals God’s hatred against all attempts to change the Apostolic gospel. It does not matter who it is, regardless of his status. The message, not the messenger, is the issue. Neither angels nor apostles can change this message. *Any* variation from the biblical gospel brings one under the divine curse: ANATHEMA! This word is translated “eternally condemned” (NIV) and “accursed” (NASB). This is the Greek rendering of the Hebrew HEREM. “In a holy war the herem involved in practice the destruction of everyone and everything that fell under it”⁹ (cf. Deuteronomy 4:2; 29:19; Joshua 7:1, 20). Those, like Schuller, who think Paul’s words intemperate, should turn to Matthew 23:13-39 and read the words of Jesus. His language in that passage is even more severe than that of the Apostle’s.

B. His justification for his indignation.

The Judaizers accused Paul of tailoring his message to please men. Well, does this sound like a man-pleaser? If the Apostle’s intention had been to please his listeners, he would have never abandoned Judaism and become the bondservant of Christ.

CONCLUSION: All so-called messengers of the gospel are to be judged by the truth of the gospel (Galatians 2:14). The message validates the messenger. What will happen if we do not safeguard the gospel? Listen to the sober words of C.H. Spurgeon, spoken over a century ago:

Look you, sirs, *there are ages yet to come*. If the Lord does not speedily appear, there will come another generation, and another, and all these generations will be tainted and injured if we are not faithful to God and to his truth to-day. We have come to a turning-point in the road. If we turn to the right, mayhap our children and our children’s children will go that way; but if we turn to the left, generations yet unborn will curse our names for having been unfaithful to God and to his Word. I charge you, not only by your ancestry, but by your posterity,

that you seek to win the commendation of your Master, that though you dwell where Satan's seat is, you yet hold fast his name, and do not deny his faith. God grant us faithfulness, for the sake of the souls around us! How is the world to be saved if the church is false to her Lord? How are we to lift the masses if our fulcrum is removed! If our gospel is uncertain, what remains but increasing misery and despair? Stand fast, my beloved, in the name of God! I, your brother in Christ, entreat You to abide in the truth. Quit yourselves like men, be strong. The Lord sustain you for Jesus' sake. Amen.¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ J. F. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1993), p. 122.

² D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: An Exposition of Chapter I* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 55.

³ Cf. Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* (Waco: Word, 1982), p. 64. Schuller defines sin as "Any human condition or act that robs God of glory by stripping one of his children of their right to divine dignity... Sin is that deep lack of trust that separates me from God and leaves me with a sense of shame and unworthiness" (p. 14). Schuller's assessment of the Apostle Paul is not better. "Luther and Calvin, we know, looked to the Book of Romans in the Bible for their primary inspiration. Were they, unknowingly, possessed more by the spirit of St. Paul than by the Spirit of Jesus Christ?" (p. 39). Schuller's remarks clearly reveal that his understanding of the Gospel is not that of the Apostle Paul. What is distressing is to hear men like Billy Graham, James Kennedy and Bill Bright refer to Schuller as a faithful preacher of the gospel and a fellow evangelical minister.

⁴ S.L. Johnson, *Galatians: Believers Bible Bulletin* (Dallas: Believers Chapel, 1978), Lesson 2, p. 2.

⁵ The expression occurs often in classical writers as a complaint. It always carries the connotation of extreme dissatisfaction. Cf. Hans Deiter Betz, *Galatians: Hermeneia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 47.

⁶ It is also possible that the word translated "quickly" (TACHEOS) has the sense of "easily" (cf. II Thessalonians 2:2; I Timothy 5:22), in which case the thought is the Galatians were easy prey for the Judaizers.

⁷ The word appears in Acts 2:20 (the sun will be *turned* to darkness) and James 4:9 (*change* you laughter to mourning).

⁸ William Perkins, *A Commentary of Galatians: With Introductory Essays*, ed. G.T. Sheppard (rpt. New York: Pilgram, 1989), p. 18. I have modernized Perkins' Old English spelling.

⁹ F.F. Bruce, *New International Greek Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), p. 83.

¹⁰ As cited by MacArthur, *op. cit.*, p. 42.