

JUST ONE GOSPEL**Galatians 1:1-10****(Read Galatians 1:1-10)**

Intro: In my 61 years I have gained and lost lots of weight. Maybe tons. When I find a diet that works, I can get on a roll I can really lose weight. And when I get on a roll, I become the biggest disciple of healthy eating and making wise choices. I become the picture of discipline and can shun the kind of things that make me gain weight, like sugar, bread, and fat, and, frankly, the real problem, eating too much. You, when it all comes down to it, portion control is the issue. No seconds is the mantra. Eat two cookies instead of 10 – or 30. When I'm on a diet I'm a paragon of discipline.

And then, I'm walking into Hawkins on a Saturday morning and there are 5 sweet little girls and one or two motivated moms and they are selling Girl Scout cookies. Discipline gets sold down the river for a sleeve of Thin Mints. Esau's got nothing on me, he only sold his inheritance,

And here we are entering the autumn months when Sweetzels Spiced Wafers, a Philadelphia delicacy, start arriving in Care packages from the East. Ohhhh Mercy!!! When there is a glass of milk in front of me, one or two Sweetzels Ginger Snaps will never do the trick when a whole sleeve or even a whole box is there. Portion control is a distant memory. And when Ben Dohner and I have a bag of Dan-Dee Corn Curls, it becomes an empty bag in minutes flat. Just like that I can totally betray everything I formally believed in and talked about, like discipline, portion control, health and diet. I'm amazed at how quickly I lose my weight plan way.

I'm like Paul. He was amazed at how quickly the Galatians had fallen away from the good news they had so ardently and happily received and accepted. What had been so important to them before, and what had been so powerful for them, had now slipped away into what he refers to as another gospel. And he's quick to point out, is actually no gospel at all. You see, if gospel means good news, it did not describe what the Galatians were doing and Paul did not like what he was hearing. There is only one Gospel and this other gospel was bringing great confusion. So, as we just heard, Paul wrote a rather blistering letter to his friends in the Church in the region of Galatia, which is in what is now central Turkey.

We can learn from Paul's tough talk. In many ways we struggle with some of the same things they did. We can also learn from what Paul says about himself. We can have the same confidence to share the Good News in a world that tries to tear it down. With that in mind I'm going to spend some time between now and Christmas time learning from the letter to the Galatians.

Paul points out right away where his authority comes from. And we would do well to look at what he says, because we have the same authority. Notice here that . . .

We have been assigned by God to carry the Good News

- Right away, Paul flashes his official creds. We're going to look more in depth at Paul's impeccable credentials next week; but let me just say this, because we have the same assignment. He says that his apostleship came directly from the calling of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is telling the errant Galatians in no uncertain terms that he did not sign up for this gig. Jesus Christ himself knocked him to the ground as he traveled to Damascus and changed his occupation from persecutor of Christians to dedicated Christian in seconds. And for that reason, he is not on mission because of his own motivation but he is sent by Jesus himself. So, if his readers had any questions, they needed to take it up with the boss. They didn't have to answer to him, they had to answer to God himself in the Son Jesus Christ.
- Think about that Church. Our calling is real! Jesus gave the Great Commission in Matthew 28 to go into all the world and make disciples and that commission is our marching orders. We don't have to be timid – we've got a calling from the same Jesus who called the Apostle Paul to take the Good News to a lost world. We can be bold about it too – not obnoxious – BOLD. We have the assignment – let's do it.
- Paul then offers the Galatians *Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*. v. 3 This is the source of our courage for the bold message of the Good News. We have been rescued from an evil age, and we offer the same to a lost and gullible world. So, as you do it . . .

Watch what you fall for

- I listened to this passage in about ten different translations and paraphrases and the variety of words to describe Paul's astonishment at how the Galatians are falling for false and washed up teaching is a lesson

in incredulity. Paul is blown away. He'd have never think these Christians, of all people, would be so quick to throw it all away.

- Well, incredulous or not, Paul was dealing with human nature, and maybe he shouldn't have been so surprised. Humans are fickle. What was popular last year for back-to-school fashions is so out of style for this year. What was all the rage last week is a distant memory this week. What causes a furor on the news today will be a mere blip by tomorrow. We have short attention spans and in the information age they are getting even shorter. The truth is, the Good News isn't a fad – it is timeless and necessary for a lost humanity.
- Paul was frustrated by the fact that the freedom he preached was being diluted with the bondage Jesus had died on the Cross to deliver us from. Specifically, people had come with a message that the old Jewish works religion was necessary for Christ Followers. We will talk much more extensively about this over the next several months, but suffice it to say here, Paul was blown away at how rapidly a free people, covered by grace, had stepped back into the prison of working for their salvation.
- And we need to be careful ourselves. Think about how difficult we make the Christian walk. We have struggled over throughout history as Brethren in Christ with falling into a trap of dos and don'ts. It was right down to how we dressed and cut our hair. Thank God those days are gone. We don't have a dress code anymore, but maybe some teaching on modesty would be in order.
- Yes, grace and peace are wonderful but do we extend it at the expense of holiness? It's a fine line and Bible is our guide. So, watch what you fall for. Just because something is accepted in society doesn't mean it is acceptable practice or belief for a Christ Follower who knows his/her Bible. Watch what you fall for because . . .

The consequences are grave

- Paul says that false teachers should be *under God's curse* (vv 8 and 9). Yes, he's ticked. And he uses very strong language to make his point. But should we not be angry when people are led astray? Jesus had children surrounding him when he said *"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea."* Matthew 18:6. The penalty for leading people astray is not inconsequential. The responsibility I have as a preacher when I get up here on Sunday morning is monumental. To make sure that I preach the truth and the whole truth is a heavy burden. James laid it on the line for me when he wrote *Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.* James 3:1. That's why I cringe when I hear preachers twisting biblical teaching on any number of things including prosperity and sexuality. The responsibility is huge and Paul does not mince words. By the way, if you want to hear a preacher preaching truth, listen to Pastor Dan Allan's messaged from the past several weeks. (explain)
- But it's not just preachers. Every Christ Follower bears a responsibility. We are witnesses. How is your witness? When you are in a restaurant and the server sees you praying for your meal, she makes a character judgment about you. How does your treatment of her and your tip reflect the Lord she saw you pray to? When you are driving into town and someone cuts you off, how does your response reflect on the fish emblem you have on your trunk lid? When you call customer service with a concern about a bill or a balance, how does your treatment of that young man or that young lady reflect on your Lord, when your email address which, like mine, pastorkat4@gmail.com, indicates that I am a Christ Follower? And, while we're on the subject of phone calls, regardless of whether or not there is an indication of the fact that you are a Christ Follower, how does your treatment of that South Asian person on the other end reflect your profession of faith? Just asking.
- We are ambassadors of the living God. We represent a message of freedom. Let's not sell our Lord short. Let's do honor to our Lord, even as we realize our tremendous responsibility.

Conclusion: Well, that's a start for the letter to the Galatians. It's a love letter, but it's not full of sweet nothings – Paul is strident in his teaching to people he loves very much. It's a message we need to hear. Just a quick review:

We have been assigned by God to bring the Good News. We have a responsibility to share it, regardless of what people think.

We need to watch out what we fall for. There are lots of counterfeit messages and rolled eyes that can discourage and frustrate us. And sometimes they tickle itching ears. Don't fall for it.

We need to realize the incredible responsibility we have to speak the truth and nothing but the truth. There is just one Gospel, let's share it. Amen.