

June 10, 2007
Pentecost 2

"Keep the Gospel Pure"

GALATIANS 1:1-10

Paul, an apostle-- sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead-- ² and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: ³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. ⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! ⁹ As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned! ¹⁰ Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

I have in my hand a bottle of water. I know that this bottle of water is safe to drink because it is still sealed. I can twist the cap, break the seal and drink the water. However, if I stopped at a convenience store, picked up a bottle of water and then discovered that seal had been broken, I would wonder if it were safe to drink. Did some malicious and evil person open the bottle in the store and put a drop of poison in the bottle? Or did someone open it and take a sip from their disease infested mouth and put it back on the shelf? We don't want to put water into our mouths that is polluted or poisoned.

In these words just read to from the opening verse of Galatians, the Apostle Paul issues a powerful statement, even a curse, against those who would pollute and corrupt the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul had taught the people that they were saved entirely by what Christ has done for them and by the work of God's grace in their lives. False teachers came into the congregations and taught the people they had to still keep certain laws from the Old Testament such as circumcision to be a true believer. Instead of Christ alone as the source of salvation, it was Christ doing his part and the people doing their part. Such teaching always leaves us troubled and without hope because we live under the dark cloud of uncertainty. Have I done my part correctly, even if it is a small percentage of what is necessary for me to be saved?

You and I were born with hearts that were completely corrupted by sin. Part of this corruption is the powerful, inborn belief that if I do something wrong, I have the power to make it right. Oh, I may be able to make up for hurting someone by showing them kindness and courtesy. The other day I thought I had stepped in front of someone who was waiting in line. I apologized but then was reassured that I had actually been there first. If I had stepped in front of someone by accident I would do everything possible to make up for what I done wrong. I am born thinking I can do the same with God. Even after coming to believe that Christ Jesus is my only source of forgiveness and peace with

God, there is an old part of me that functions like this magnet in my hand. It wants to constantly pull me back into thinking that there is a just a little I can contribute towards what Christ has done for me. This idea does not come from God. It comes from Satan whom the Bible describes as masquerading like an angel of light. In the last days Satan will do everything in his power to pollute the truth that it is Christ Jesus, and Christ alone that pays the price of sin. Today we want to speak to you on this important subject, **"Keep the Gospel Pure."**

The gospel message made you what you are

Look at who you are this morning. You are someone who has been changed because the pure message of the gospel was given to you. Paul begins the letter to the Galatians by rejoicing in who he was by God's grace and mercy. "Paul-an apostle-sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead." Paul was sent by God, not by people. It was the hand of God that had rescued him from foolishly believing his works saved him. It was the hand of God that gave him the privilege of talking to other people about Jesus. These blessings came to Paul and to us from Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is the guarantee that everything Jesus did for you is real.

How grand and glorious is your life that has been shaped by the pure message of the gospel! Paul writes, "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." You are who you are by the grace of God. That gives us a peace this world cannot give. Here Paul says it was Jesus who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age. The picture in the word "rescue" is that of snatching someone or grabbing them.

See the person drowning after their boat has capsized in storm.

The Coast Guard helicopter drops a man in the water who swims to the person that is about to go under for the last time. He wraps his arms around the person, puts a life vest around them, grabs onto the cable of the helicopter and attaches it to his body, lift the person to safety. Let go, become limp, let the rescue person do their job. The more you try to help along, the more you get in the way of the rescue.

God knew he had to take the important matter of salvation out of your hand and take charge for us. He did not say, "I will do my part by sending Jesus for you, and you have to do your part. It was God's will and to his glory that everything was done safely and securely by Jesus. It was carefully planned out down to every last detail of suffering and pain. The prophet Isaiah tells us, "It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life as a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hands." It was God's will and God's desire to have Jesus die, have him see the light of life, and then see him reach out to people and bring them to believe through the message of the gospel. God's will did not involve Jesus doing his part and you doing your part. It was all Jesus. Oh how we love the hymns and songs that express this truth clearly such as the hymn we just sung, "Before the Throne of God Above" with these words,

Behold Him there! The risen Lamb My perfect, spotless, Righteousness

The Great unchangeable I AM The King of Glory and of Grace

One with Himself I cannot die My soul is purchased by His blood

My life is hid with Christ on high With Christ my Savior and my God

With Christ my Savior and my God

All the glory belongs to God as Paul writes, "To whom be glory forever and ever. Amen." Someday in heaven we will stand around the throne of the Lamb and join with Christians of every age singing together this glorious song, "Salvation belongs to God and to the Lamb." I had no part in my salvation. It belongs to God. He gets the glory for the rescue. He is the one who has made you what you are through this message of the gospel.

Do you recall how a hiker rescued himself a few years ago when a rock fell on his arm? He was hiking in a slot canyon in Utah. A large rock came loose and pinned his arm in the narrow canyon wall. He could not move the rock, so he saved himself by cutting off his arm with a small knife in his pocket. You and I were pinned under our load of sin, but we were totally powerless to save ourselves. We could not even get a small sliver out with a pin, or scratch ourselves, or flex our muscles. We weren't even alive when Jesus came to rescue us. He saved us, and made us alive in him. That's grace. That's peace. That's the pure message of the gospel that needs to be preserved and kept pure.

The gospel message will be challenged

You can be sure, 100% sure, that something so beautiful and pure as this message will not be allowed to be proclaimed to people. Satan will do everything in his power to convince people they need to add something to the message to be saved. Paul was totally astonished that these people who knew the truth could so quickly leave the truth by listening to false teachers who said, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel, which is not gospel at all." He says that this people were perverting or changing or altering the gospel of Jesus' Christ. What was the problem among these churches? When Paul left them in Ephesus he warned them that savage wolves would come into the flock and not spare them. This happened right after Paul left when Jewish Christians started teaching that it was necessary to hang on to certain Old Testament laws and practices to be a true believer. They were adding rules and regulations to what Christ has done and made that part of the gospel message.

Mormon missionaries knock at your door. You engage them in conversation and witness to the fact that you believe the blood of Jesus cleanses you from all sin and that is your only hope of being saved. How surprised you are to hear them say, "That is exactly what we believe." What you don't realize is that they believe that Jesus paid for their original sin from Adam's fall, but it is up to us in our daily obedience to make ourselves worthy. Or how about the young man who visits the priest to confess his sin, and hears that his sin is forgiven. But then added to the forgiveness is a list of prayers and works that need to be done as part of the repentance package. The poor fellow goes home, tries to complete

the process of forgiveness and always fails. Finally he gives up without any hope of ever finding forgiveness. That is another gospel.

In the introduction to the lectures on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote about what he called an active righteousness and a passive righteousness. The active righteousness is what we do in life to better ourselves, improve ourselves or even love the Lord. That righteousness cannot save us. We put our hope and trust in a passive righteousness, where Christ does everything for us. Luther writes, "Thus I put myself beyond all active righteousness, all righteousness of my own or of the divine Law, and I embrace only that passive righteousness which is the righteousness of grace, mercy, and the forgiveness of sins."

My active righteousness is always imperfect. It always falls short of God's glory. Even my best deeds of kindness and love may have the smell and corruption of sin as I even for a fleeting moment wish that others were as kind and nice as I am. If I add my imperfections to the completed work of Christ and then make this package that I have assembled the source of my salvation and peace with God, then I am eternally lost. That is why Paul says that anyone who teaches this is to be eternally condemned. He will plunge himself into eternal death and destruction and lead others down with him.

This water bottle still has the seal on it. It is the guarantee the water is pure and safe. When Jesus rose from the dead, the heavenly Father sealed our salvation for us. Nothing needs to be added. This message must be kept pure. That's the message that we drink in deeply every time we come to worship and read the Word in or private worship during the week. O Lord help us keep this gospel message pure, and not try to add anything to what Christ has done for us. Amen.