

Pentecost 3
June 5, 2016

"Keep the Gospel Pure"

GALATIANS 1:11-24

Iwant you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. ¹³ For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶ to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. ¹⁸ Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ I saw none of the other apostles-- only James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰ I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. ²¹ Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. ²² I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they praised God because of me.

Having pure clean water is very important to us. We think of the people in Flint, Michigan who thought their water was safe to drink but then were told it was contaminated with lead poisoning. In poor countries where there is no good source of pure water, people get sick from drinking water that is contaminated and polluted.

Even more important than pure water, is a pure source for your salvation, your forgiveness of sin and your peace with God. We have that pure source in Jesus Christ our Savior. If you attempt to add anything to what Christ has done you will contaminate and destroy the purity of what Jesus has done to save you. How foolish it would be to open a bottle of water such as this, pour a little out, and then add dirty, polluted water to what is pure and clean. And it would be even more foolish to proclaim this contaminated water as the best water in the world.

The Apostle Paul is deeply concerned about the Christians in Galatia because the pure message of Jesus living, loving, dying, rising and doing everything for us is being undermined. The dear Christians were being told it is not enough to have Christ. You need to add the keeping of Old Testament rules and regulations to what Jesus has done to make it better. You know the formula. You know it well. Christ plus nothing equals everything. Christ plus anything equals nothing. Let's turn our attention today to these words of Paul about keeping the gospel pure.

The pure gospel comes to us through direct revelation from God

The pure gospel is not something you find in yourself. This pure gospel is found only in

God's revelation to you on the pages of the Bible. Listen to Paul proclaim this truth to us. "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." We just sang a hymn with the words, "In Christ alone, my hope is found." That's the message Paul proclaimed. His critics were saying, "That's Paul's idea. He made this up in his head and then started teaching it to others." Paul wants the dear Christians to know this teaching did not originate with him but came directly from God through revelation.

The message that we are saved by Christ alone cannot originate inside of our natural hearts that hard wired to believe we can do something to save ourselves. The message of Christ alone must come to us from God and it is our God who leads us to believe this message of Christ is true. How true the words are from 1 Corinthians 2 that tell us, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him' - but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit."

Paul says he received this message of the gospel by revelation from Jesus Christ. As long as Paul lived he always carried with him that amazing revelation that took place on the road to Damascus. Here he was traveling along on the road to Damascus to find Christians he might arrest and then bring them back to Jerusalem and put them to death. It was on that road that Jesus appeared to him in a blinding light and a voice called from heaven, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me." This man Saul who later takes the name of Paul cries out, "Who are you Lord." The voice comes and says, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Three little words "I am Jesus" reveal to Paul that Jesus is Lord and God and Jesus is his Savior. Miraculously he goes from drinking the dirty, polluted water of saving himself to the pure, clean water of Christ alone. He writes later in this letter to the Galatians, "So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

My dear Christians, your God has come to you and revealed or unveiled the message of the gospel to you. You did not come up with this belief that you are saved by Christ alone by something special inside of you. You did not do this because you were born dead in trespasses and sin. Your God revealed this to you here on the pages of the Bible. Jesus has come to you here in his Word and simply said to you, "I am Jesus." I am your Savior. Let me do everything for you, because you can do nothing, absolutely nothing to save yourself. "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

And if you want more evidence that this pure gospel comes from outside of you from God, look more closely at how Paul describes his life before being a Christian. "For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely jealous for the traditions of my fathers." Paul is saying, "Look at me, look at me, look at the miracle that took place in my life." Here was a man totally taken up with the traditions of the Jewish people, totally taken up with following laws to earn his way to heaven, and totally taken up with persecuting Christians because he thought he was being loyal to God. But then Jesus appeared to him. This change did not come from within him but from God.

How is it that you believe you are saved entirely by what Christ has done while other people in this community and in your circle of friends believe that they will be rewarded by God on the day of judgment for how good they try to be? This belief did not come from with us. It came outside of us, just as it did with Paul. "It is by grace we are saved, through faith- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."

Paul will not let anyone add anything to the message of the gospel because it is so beautiful. "But when God who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus." It appears that people were accusing Paul of getting his message of the pure gospel from within himself or from other apostles. No, says, Paul, I didn't even consult with the other apostles in Jerusalem. This pure message was confirmed by God himself in special revelations he received while alone in Arabia.

Your God who loves you and cares so much for has revealed himself to you as he did to Paul. Over all these years God's Word has continually brought you closer and closer to this pure message of the gospel. With Paul you can say, "God has set me apart from birth." Yes, even before you were born into this world, your God had it in his plan to have you believe Christ has done it all for you. We think of the words of Ephesians 1, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight." He chose us to believe we are washed clean by the blood of Christ, and not by anything we can add to what Jesus has done.

I am holding in my hand a bar of Ivory soap. Ivory soap is suppose to be 99:44% pure. You know that you find nothing pure in yourself that can measure up to what God expects of you. Your purity, your forgiveness, your cleansing is found only in Jesus. More than anything I want to keep this pure and not be deceived into thinking I must add something to Christ.

The pure gospel passes through us by direct revelation

When you come to know that the source of your salvation is pure in Christ, you want other people to come to the same understanding so they also came be saved. God's plan for Paul was to set him apart and use him to preach this pure message to the Gentiles. Paul received further messages or revelations from the Lord to help him with this work of reaching out to others. No other people were involved in influencing his training. God did this directly and the message was kept pure. Listen again to what he says: "The after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles-only James the Lord's brother. I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. Later I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea. They only heard the report: 'The man who formerly persecuted us is preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.'"

The Lord has set us apart to take this pure message of the gospel given to us and to give it to others. This past week I had the opportunity to talk to someone about my faith

in Christ. He had lots of questions about God and the Bible and creation and salvation. He asked me how I knew what I believed is true? I had the opportunity to talk to him about the uniqueness of the Christian message. All of the religions in the world without exception ask you to do something to put your life right with whatever God you believe in. Only in the Christian faith do you have the teaching that God sent his Son to do everything for you. Then he said as we ended our conversation, "Have you ever wondered if you have been brainwashed?" "No," I said, "I like to think God has washed my brain."

So it was with the Apostle Paul whose brain was washed by God's grace and mercy to believe in Christ instead of his good works for his salvation. To the Christians in Philippi he wrote that he considered everything he had learned in the past as rubbish, "that I may gain Christ and to be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ- the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith."

When you know this pure source of salvation you want others to join you in believing what you believe. Paul had that joy in his life. He saw others come to drink deeply from the pure fountain of salvation that was in Christ. He says joyfully, "And they praised God because of me." Your God has lead you to believe the message of the gospel is pure. Now he uses you and me to bring this pure message to those confused and without hope. Amen.