**No Other Gospel but the Gospel of Christ**

February 16, 2014

Galatians 1:1-24

Key Verse 1:6-7 “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 really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.”

The key word of Galatians is “freedom.” Paul proclaims that the gospel gives freedom from both sin and legalism. The Bible says that, spiritually speaking, no one is free. We are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. We have been set free from sin by the Son of God who said, “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” (John 8:36) Once we are freed from the power of sin, we belong to Christ, and in Jesus we find true freedom, free from fear, guilt, death and condemnation. We are now holy children of God. We are so precious in God. But many Christians still live in fear. They think they need to do something to be holy. Many times, we carry around the burden that we have to do something to earn or to make sure we are saved. But none of our efforts can save us. Only faith in Christ Jesus makes us right before God. The reason why we have such a hard time accepting this truth is that we live in a society that tells us that we have to do to be. Our society tells us: you are valuable only if you are pretty. You are more valuable if you produce. You are definitely more valuable if you can slam dunk a basketball, throw a touchdown pass or hit a homerun. You are valuable if you have a Dr. after your name, or star in movies. Where does this value system leave the average people? In a constant struggle to be somebody or do something that society tells them to be, they feel like they are not really worth all that much. Christ frees us from the lie if we believe. Let’s suppose you are competing in ice skating in the Olympics. You are about to go up for your last performance. Before you do, the judges inform you that you have already won the gold medal. You already have enough points before this last skating performance. How do you think you are going to skate? Are you going to hold back, be nervous or give into fear? NO! You will probably skate your best ever, you will be free to skate as never before because you have already won. If we are in Christ, we are free. We are free to skate like never before because we know that through Christ the victory is already ours.

In today’s passage, Paul emphasizes the uniqueness of the gospel. It is a vital truth for us. We live in a multicultural society with people of many beliefs. We practice mutual respect to coexist. It is important to respect others, for God made us all in his image. However, in the course of doing this, we must not fall into the error that all truth claims are equally valid. The gospel is the unique truth of salvation from God. In our time, there is a strong influence from “universalism.” It is the error that all people will be saved, no matter what they believe, as long as they live with integrity and sincerity. However, Paul urges that what we believe really matters. Today Paul challenges us with a clear teaching on the uniqueness of the gospel. There is only one gospel, the gospel of Christ.

Look at verse 1. “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 emphasized that his apostleship came not from man, but from Jesus Christ. Paul wrote this way in Galatians to counter the “Judaizers,” who said that he was not an apostle, since he was not one of Jesus’ original Twelve. They wanted to undermine Paul’s authority and discredit his message so that Galatian Christians would abandon Paul and follow them. However, Paul’s claim to be an apostle was based on his personal encounter with the Risen Christ. While Paul traveled from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute Christians, suddenly, a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” (Ac 9:4) It was the Risen Christ. The Risen Christ overpowered Paul with love, changing him from an enemy to a follower. The Risen Christ called him to be an apostle and blessed his ministry to the Gentiles abundantly. It was nothing but the work of God by the almighty power that raised Jesus from the dead. Paul may not have known the historical Jesus who lived in Galilee, but he knew the Risen Christ intimately and received his commission from Christ. On this basis, Paul claimed to be an apostle on par with the other apostles.

Look at verses 4-5. “...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.” The Bible tells us that our real problem is the sin problem. Sin is like an invisible cancer of the soul that affects every human being. It cuts people off from God, the source of life, and eats away at the goodness of God in us. Though one sin may seem like an insignificant act, it enslaves a soul permanently. For example, to look at pornography just one time, to take dangerous drugs just one time, to betray a trust just one time, to steal one small thing, and the like can lead to a lifetime bondage that brings utter ruin. Sin finally brings death and eternal punishment in hell. This is the destiny of all people, for “...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” (Ro 3:23). Though people suffer greatly from sin, there is no way to solve the sin problem. Psychology cannot solve it; neither can money, technology, reason, education, willpower, or medication. We are totally helpless to solve our sin problem. Yet, while we were helpless, Jesus Christ came to rescue us. Jesus came down from heaven and died on the cross, shedding his blood. Christ’s death paid the full price of the sins of all mankind. Then God raised him from the dead. In this way, Christ purchased our forgiveness of sins and reconciled us with God. Now we can call God “Father.” God is no longer the fearsome Judge who finds our slightest sins and condemns us to death. God is the loving Father whom we can approach freely and cry out to him for help. The gospel may have been stated most clearly by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:3b,4. It says, “...that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures....” This is the core of the gospel. By this gospel we are saved, when we hold firmly to its truth.

Let’s read verses 6-7. “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 really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.” Paul uses strong language to awaken a sense of problem in the Galatians. He says they have deserted God; they have turned to a different gospel; they are confused by those who have perverted the gospel. To understand the seriousness of their condition, we need to compare “the gospel of Christ” that Paul preached with “a different gospel” that the Judaizers preached.

Paul had preached the gospel of Christ to the Galatian believers on his first mission journey. The Book of Acts tells us how the Holy Spirit led Paul and Barnabas to Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe (Ac 13-14). While the context of his message differed from place to place, the essence of Paul’s message was that Christ died for our sins and God raised him from the dead. Whoever believes in Christ receives forgiveness of sins and is justified by God (Ac 13:26-41). Many Gentiles accepted this message and received eternal life through Christ. Paul and Barnabas appointed elders in each church, committed them to the Lord, and returned to Syrian Antioch.

In Paul’s absence, some people, called “Judaizers,” came into the churches in Galatia. They taught new Gentile believers that faith in Christ was not enough. They said that unless the Gentiles were circumcised, and obeyed Moses’ law, they would not be saved (Ac 15:1). This is what Paul calls “another gospel.” The Judaizers added an element of human work to the work of Christ as a matter of salvation. At first glance this may not seem to be a serious matter. The Judaizers did not deny Christ; they claimed to believe in Christ. But they added something to the gospel. To Paul, it was so serious that he called it “perverting the gospel.”

Here we must realize that salvation comes totally from what Christ has done for us, not from anything we have done. All we do is believe in Christ. There is nothing we can add to the work of Christ. So we cannot claim any credit for our salvation. All glory belongs to Christ, and to God the Father who sent him. However, in our times, there are people who claim we must add something to the gospel. Some say that unless one is baptized in their church, that person is not saved. Others claim that some kind of specific spiritual experiences must accompany salvation. They are all adding to the gospel. We can also add to the gospel by taking pride in ourselves or our works. Some think they will go to heaven because they donate money to charity, volunteer at homeless shelters, pray at set times of the day, fasting every week, make pilgrimages to holy sites, or spare the lives of insects. Some think they will merit heaven by being tolerant and supportive of others, even those who engage in a deviant behavior.

We should remember that we are sinners, nothing but sinners, helpless to save ourselves. Yet God, in his great mercy, saved us through Christ by his grace. We are not saved because of anything we do. We are not saved because we write Bible testimonies, eat Daily Bread, deliver messages, teach the Bible well, evangelize students, go as missionaries, or endure UBF training for 30 years. These can be very helpful to our spiritual lives, but they do not merit our salvation. We are not saved because we have a title or position in the church, such as pastor, elder, missionary, shepherd, fellowship leader, or prayer servant. We are saved by Christ alone, through faith alone, by grace alone, for the glory of God alone. When we receive the gospel of God’s grace, it makes us thankful; it makes us humble; it fills us with love and inspires us to love God because he first loved us. But when we add any human effort to the gospel of Christ, it makes us proud, self-righteous and ungrateful.

The temptation to magnify human merit along with Christ is very strong. It is also very deceptive. While sounding good, it leads people away from the gospel of Christ. When sinners glorify their polluted works, God is greatly offended, perhaps more than he is by drug addiction or sexual immorality. We need to clearly discern this tendency and to regard it for the wickedness that it is. In verses 8-9 Paul gives a strong warning. He says that no one can change the gospel of Christ, not Paul, not an angel from heaven, not anyone. Anyone who tries to change the gospel of Christ will be cursed by God--eternally condemned.

In verses 13-17, Paul shares his personal testimony. He was once a zealous Jew who was passionate for Moses’ law. He was just like the Judaizers. He wanted to destroy the church of God, thinking it was a dangerous cult. It was beyond imagination that he would be a gospel preacher. However, God called him by grace and revealed his Son to Paul. Paul became the most prominent gospel preacher. Only God could do this. After meeting Christ, Paul did not seek human confirmation of his calling. Rather, he went to Arabia and spent time in prayer and deep Bible study to harmonize his overwhelming experience of Christ with the Scriptures. According to a theologian, he went to Mount Sinai just as Elijah went there to meet God. (Paul said that Mount Sinai is in Arabia in Gal 4:25.) He came to know the gospel by Christ’s revelation, without help from the other apostles. He stood purely on faith in Christ’s revelation to him. This emphasizes that his authority to preach came directly from Christ, not through the other apostles or the Jerusalem Church. The churches of Judea remembered Paul as an enemy of the gospel before he met Christ. But they heard that the man who formerly persecuted them was now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. They realized that only Christ could bring about such a change. So they praised God for his work in Paul. This was further evidence that Paul had been changed by Christ and called by Christ. Paul wanted the Galatians to recognize Christ’s work in him and to come back to the gospel.

Christ died for our sins and rose again from the dead. When we believe this, we are saved, solely by what Christ has done for us. God made us his holy children. That is who we are. If we believe this, we can be free from the devil’s lie that we need to do something to prove our worth or holiness. We can experience true freedom in Christ.