

20260301 Doctrinal Purity – Ps Bijoy

Galatians 1 :1-10

Today we are beginning a brand-new sermon series on the book of Galatians. This book helps us to be firmly grounded in the basic truths of the Christian faith. And there is no truth more basic than the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to know how God saves sinners and we need to know this for ourselves, so we can share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

That's where the little book of Galatians comes in. It is short - only six brief chapters. But do not be deceived by its size. The book of Galatians is dynamite. A tiny stick of dynamite can blow up a big building. Galatians is spiritual dynamite. Martin Luther read it and an explosion went off in his heart that led to the Protestant Reformation. John Wesley heard a sermon based on Luther's commentary on Galatians and was profoundly converted. From Luther to Calvin to Wesley to the Puritans to Spurgeon to Billy Graham, there is a direct line from this ancient epistle to who we are and what we believe today.

“How can I be free?”

More than anything else, Galatians is a book about freedom. It answers the question, “How can I be truly free?” Free from guilt, free from fear, free from doubt, free from sin, free from always trying and never quite making it. When the world looks at that question, it offers two contradictory answers. Some people think freedom comes from keeping the rules. Do good, try harder, go to church, be baptized, give your money, follow the Ten Commandments, do what your priest tells you to do, offer a sacrifice, light a candle, say the Hail Mary, meditate, use the prayer wheel. The list is endless because the human mind is endlessly creative in the ways it devises to please a God it cannot see or understand. But rule keeping always fails in the end because you can never be sure you've done enough. If one prayer is enough, would two be better? How many candles should I light? You can never be absolutely certain. Then people say, “Oh, this life is hard. I hate this life”

On the other extreme are those who say that freedom comes by throwing all the rules aside. “Do what you want. Have a blast. You only go around once. There are no rules. If it feels good, do it.” But in the end, hedonism (self-indulgence) cannot satisfy either. You end up exchanging one form of slavery for another. You end up like Solomon who had it all and tried it all and concluded with a cry of desperation,

“I hated life” (Ecclesiastes 2:16-18). Rules can’t save you, but you won’t be happy if you ignore the rules either.

So, the big question now is if legalism (trying to find freedom and assurance by keeping the rules) doesn’t work, and if hedonism (the pure pursuit of pleasure regardless of the rules) doesn’t work, where can we find true freedom in life? Galatians gives us a simple and compelling answer: Freedom comes not from rules or the lack of rules but in a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. The only true freedom is the freedom that comes from knowing him as Savior and Lord. Those whom Christ sets free are free indeed.

Salutation/Introduction (v 1-5)

How many of you like checking the letterbox? Even though I hardly receive any mail, I still check it at least twice a day. So, whenever an unexpected letter arrives, I want to know three things about it. Who is it from? Who is it to? What’s it all about? The salutation answers all three questions.

Paul’s Authority 1-2

“Paul, an apostle sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia” (Galatians 1:1-2).

These verses tell us that this letter was written by the Apostle Paul. The word “apostle” means “one sent with delegated authority.” In this case, it means that Paul was not appointed by men or elected by men nor was he chosen by some church council. His calling and his authority come directly from God (some people didn’t accept Paul as he was not one of the 12 disciples). So, Paul wants the reader to give utmost importance to the letter, since he speaks with God’s authority.

We also learn that the letter is addressed to the churches of Galatia. The region of Galatia was located in the central portion of modern-day Turkey. It was a Gentile region, which meant that these churches were primarily Gentile, not Jewish. That point will become very important as we attempt to understand what Paul wrote. And the letter was not sent to just one church but to the churches in that region.

On his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), Paul preached the gospel and established local churches in Galatia. He taught the new believers the doctrines of the Christian faith, appointed leaders, and then moved on to the next town to repeat the process. Sometime after he left, a group of Jewish Christian “converts” from Jerusalem (they are friends of James, gal 2:12) came into the region claiming to speak

for the original apostles in Jerusalem. Over time they spread rumours that Paul was not a “real” apostle and that he had not preached a full or complete gospel. In particular, they told these young Galatian believers that they needed to be circumcised or follow the Judaic rituals in order to be saved. They evidently also attempted to get the Galatians to mix their Christian faith with part of the Old Testament law. It is clear that the false teachers were very persuasive and the people at the Galatian churches were badly confused or at worst were almost completely seduced by these “Judaizers” (the name given to so-called Jewish-Christian converts who were perverting the gospel).

“Faith Only” vs “Faith Plus”

To Paul this was no small issue. He preached a “salvation by faith only” gospel. Another term for that is justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law. He taught that the way of salvation was “by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.” The Judaizers taught a “Faith plus” religion. They didn’t deny that Jesus was the Son of God, and they didn’t deny his death and resurrection, and they didn’t preach against believing in him, but they in essence said, “What Christ started, you need to finish. You must finish the unfinished work of Christ.” Remember usually perversion of the doctrine starts very subtle. So, In Paul’s mind, this was nothing less than an attack on the gospel itself. The attack on doctrine of grace is an attack on gospel itself. It comes down to a simple question: Are we saved by believing or by achieving? Paul said by believing, the Judaizers said by achieving.

Paul’s Message 3-5

“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” (Galatians 1:3-5).

Paul is so concerned that he puts a statement of the gospel right at the very front door of his letter. These verses tell us that the gospel is centered in the Lord Jesus Christ. We already know what the gospel is because Paul summed it up in verse 4 here – look back at it: “who gave Himself,” the Lord Jesus Christ – “who gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age.” Are you in there anywhere? Do you see you in there? Do you see me in there?

“Christ, who gave Himself for our sins that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of God the Father, to whom be the glory forevermore. Amen.” You’re not there, because that’s a

work of God, and that's a work of Christ, and all glory to God for it. That is the heart of the gospel. It's not what you do, it's what Christ has done. God validated what Christ did by raising Him from the dead and exalting Him to His right hand.

The gospel is not about us; it's about what God has done for us through his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is about the death and resurrection of our Lord. Through him all the benefits of the gospel flow freely to everyone who believes in him. This is the truth that the Galatians were in danger of deserting.

Verses 6-10

Galatians is unique among Paul's letters because it is the only letter that does not contain a word of thanksgiving for the readers. In every other case Paul takes a verse or two or three to give thanks for his readers. But not this time. there's no prayer at the beginning of this letter as there are in his other letters. There's no praise. There's no commendation, there's no thanks, there's no personal notes; nothing is here. He just launches into this assault on them.

This conveys the seriousness, the fire in his heart, because the gospel is at stake. They had been influenced to deny the gospel of grace, the message he had preached to them.

The Crisis 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" (Galatians 1:6-7).

Paul's astonishment comes from the fact that the very believers he had discipled were such easy prey for the false teachers. Had he not taught the truth? Had they not gladly listened? Did they not welcome the liberating truth of the gospel into their hearts? How then could they be so quickly deceived? The word "deserting" is a strong word, a military term that refers to a traitor, In this case it meant leaving the gospel of grace for the gospel of salvation by merits. But that "gospel" is no gospel at all. It is a man-centered attempt to attain salvation, and as such, it appeals to our natural pride and our desire to think that we have contributed something to our own deliverance.

Biblical grace is "counter-intuitive" in that it goes against the grain of what we naturally think. Grace teaches us that there is nothing we can do to merit our salvation and that all our efforts to attain

salvation by doing good works actually move us in the wrong direction. I'm not talking about the good works as a "result of our salvation" but about the works to "earn salvation". Sin has us in its grip and no amount of religious activity or self-reformation can save us from ourselves. We are doomed and damned unless Christ rescues us from our sin. This is a shocking truth that many people cannot accept. That is why grace is "counter-intuitive."

The false teachers tapped into that "natural" desire we all feel that makes us want to contribute something to our salvation. In the case of the Galatian believers, it was circumcision and the works of the law. Paul will not tolerate this false teaching in the church. If we tolerate false teaching about the gospel, we are actually deserting Christ himself. This is no small issue. It's either salvation by Christ alone or there is no salvation at all.

Warning

"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! 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!" (Galatians 1:8-9).

These are some of the strongest words in the New Testament. The key phrase is "let him be eternally condemned." Some translations say "accursed." The Greek word is "anathema," which comes from a Hebrew term that means "devoted to destruction." It basically means to reject something completely and to condemn it to destruction. Here Paul declares that anyone (himself included) who preaches any other gospel than the gospel of free grace should be eternally condemned. He is in essence saying, "Let them go to hell." (not that He or an angel will preach a different gospel)

"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" (Galatians 1:10).

This verse adds a key point. Paul wrote as he did because he cared deeply for the eternity of his new converts or of the Judaizers. Church, we are called to stand for the truth and disciple others in truth (not to win the approval of others).

Very sadly, today a lot of churches and Christian denominations have watered down doctrinal purity. It's your truth and my truth; it's no longer The truth. There are people saying, "Don't preach hell because it makes people uncomfortable. Reject fear and embrace love.' Its grace before truth and then it ends

up being 'only grace' and no truth. The Bible needs to be reinterpreted based on culture and context, not on its original intended meaning. Sin is relative, and we shouldn't judge people just because their lifestyle doesn't match Scripture. Only God can judge people, so accept people as they are." All these are dangerous and we need to be watchful.

Standing for the truth demands that we expose error when great issues are at stake. Not everything is heresy. Pay special attention to the phrase "great issues." Not every issue is a great issue. I think there is room for disagreement on the timing of second coming (whether you are pre, post or mid trib). Certainly, we can have fellowship with believers from many different backgrounds and denominations. And whether or not you use Power Point or pro presenter on a big screen, that's not a "great issue." Some are not even a biblical issue. It is purely a matter of personal preference. Same for a thousand things we like to argue about. But there are some "great issues" that go the heart of our Christian faith. And one of such doctrine is the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone, which we will explore in depth in next week.

Jesus Makes All the Difference

Where does all of this leave us? One thing is crystal clear in the letter to the Galatians: your relationship with Jesus Christ makes all the difference in the world. In the end, nothing else will matter. So, we must run to the cross as our only hope of salvation.

Some of you might be wondering, "So, Pastor Bijoy, if my works contribute nothing to my salvation, does my lifestyle really matter? How do I know my faith isn't just intellectual, just an idea in my head, but a real, living faith?"

We will go much deeper into this when we come to chapter 5. But for now, here is my simple answer: be like David in Psalm 63:1- 4. Stand in awe of this good God. Meditate on His goodness. Let your days and your nights be filled with gratitude and love for this amazing God who has loved you unconditionally. Come before Him with deep devotion and trust Him with all your heart.