

GALATIANS



Day 257

“A Different Gospel”

September 14 - Galatians 1: 1-24

To My Friends Who are Loved by Jesus,
Sometimes you have to call a spade a
spade, cut to the quick, deal with the bottom
line or not mince words.

Galatians is that way. Paul is angry. Having just finished Corinthians, it doesn't take a scholar to guess why he is so upset with the church in Galatia. Paul was zealous for the cause of Christ and the message of the good news. The integrity of the Message was at stake here.

For a person or religious group to add one ounce of self-effort to the work of salvation would be a mockery of the complete and finished work of Jesus on the cross at Calvary, where His bloody sacrifice built the way for sinners to approach a holy and righteous God. Yet, there were those in Paul's day, like there are today, who pervert the gospel of Jesus by requiring human regulations for a person to be saved.

This was an issue, you may remember, that had already been dealt with at the Jerusalem council, a meeting recorded in Acts 15. Salvation was through faith in the finished work of Jesus, period. We are saved by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, period. This was the good news. This was the Message. If anyone or any thing said something different, they were not in the right camp, and Paul would go so far as to say they were “accursed.”

Let's face it: the good news would not be good news if its effectiveness hinged on us. Our position would be very insecure. And as a matter of fact, I don't think anyone could ever be sure of his salvation if it depended on man and not on Christ solely. The good

news is good news because sinners like you and me can have forgiveness and a place in the kingdom of God based on the righteousness of Christ, given to us freely through the grace of God. That is something to get excited about! If my salvation depended on how well I kept the law or a set of regulations, there would always be the uneasy feeling that I had not done enough.

Paul identifies those who add requirements to the message of the cross as persons who are preaching “another gospel.” The Greek here means another of a different kind. In other words, there are no similarities between the two. If you are deviating from the message of the cross then you are in another camp and are no friend of the historical and Biblical Jesus. You are preaching a false Jesus, a different Jesus, a phony Jesus. You may call him “Jesus” and make him like the Jesus of the Bible, but in actuality you are perverting the gospel by putting man's regulations on the message of grace. Paul calls it “falling from grace.”

Consider Paul's attitude about this subject in the light of where he has come from in his own life. He is a man who has moved from law to gospel. He now measures his spirituality based on Christ's merits and not his own. This was not true before—as he says, he excelled beyond many of his peers in Judaism. Paul wants to please God and not man. Therefore, he is bound to preach the gospel as the Lord Jesus has revealed it to him through revelation. This revelation, I'm sure, includes the message of the other apostles as well as the words Jesus gave him when He appeared to Paul over the years. Any variation from the true

message would not be pleasing to God but would, in Paul's words, be condemned by God.

He says that he would not be the servant of Christ if he tried to please men. So he continued to proclaim Jesus as the way and the cross as the means of salvation.

It is so easy for us to get wrapped up in pleasing others. That kind of attitude appears to be good because you are being agreeable. But it can also make you wishy-washy. We will not grow if we are only trying to please others. It is important to set our sights on pleasing God; then we will have convictions

about what is true and what we should believe. If we seek to please men, we will have a difficult time being servants of Christ.

Let's ask God to direct us today.

Let's pray and ask Him for direction.

Let's be servants of Christ and not go with the crowd.

Let's stay true to the true gospel.

God's blessings only come through the true gospel,

Pastor Steve



“Let's Talk To A False 'Brother'”

September 15 - Galatians 2:1-10

We have worked very hard this year to give a bird's-eye view of Scripture. We have emphasized a Christo-centric approach to the whole of the Bible so that we wouldn't get bogged down on side issues that take us away from the central place Christ holds. When we hit the target in this way it will begin to give us a good perspective on the 66 books. One of the many qualities of Scripture is its continuity. There are 40-plus human Bible authors, who lived over the course of two millennia, who dealt with a wide variety of situations, and yet they still speak of God and for God in a unified way. The books of the Bible form a patchwork quilt of Truth, each book a vital part of the whole.

From time to time someone will come along with “another gospel” that is a distortion of the true gospel Paul preached. In Galatians Chapter 1 Paul makes it perfectly clear that there is no room for this. Paul made it plain that the gospel stood on its own two feet and didn't need the approval of a man or men to validate its truth and power. Paul had no tolerance for any man who came along and changed the message

to suit his own agenda.

This problem was never more acute than when the legalists arrived on the scene, misquoting Scripture and twisting arms and arguing their case and upsetting the faith of some. According to Acts, Paul was constantly under their watchful eye and ire. They did not believe the good news Paul taught, and they went on the defensive in order to maintain the traditions of their elders.

Let's take a shot at writing a letter to a false brother. I guess Galatians as a whole could be viewed as such a letter, but really this little epistle is meant to warn the church about problem people who bring in heresies that disrupt the work of the gospel. OK, here's an attempt to tell the truth to a false brother who may be the guy sitting next to you at church service.

Dear Fake Freddy,

No one can question your passion for spiritual things. I have been listening closely to your comments on the life of Jesus and your reaction to the good

news that we have been preaching in His Name. But I am alarmed by the detour you have taken from the teaching of the apostles. They, of course, are our authority because of their tightness to the Savior. How can you defect from their words and create so much dissension among the brothers?

There is no doubt that you can make a case for your beliefs. I think you focus more on your ability to argue than on your position itself. I can't count the number of times I have seen you in heated debate with church members. It looks like you want to take them captive and control their way of life by manipulating them. Don't you realize that you are only leading them down the wrong road, away from the freedom we have in Christ? I think you are putting a burden on them that even you cannot carry. Remember the words of the Lord Jesus? He said the scribes and Pharisees laid burdens on men and weren't willing to lift a finger themselves. Aren't you doing the same thing by demanding that they keep a set of rules that even you could not keep 100 percent of the time?

The most dangerous thing about your departure from the truth is that you claim to be Christian. Remember, not everyone who says, “Lord, Lord,” to the Savior will make it into His kingdom. I'm sure you even believe that you are a Christian. However, you can't ignore the fact that one must follow the writings of the apostles and not add or take away from them if he wants to be considered a brother. Your legalism appears to make you a super-spiritual person, but it is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that the church depends on for salvation. Your approach nullifies the work of Christ on the cross. Do you think that you can add to His work and earn a special place of favor with God? There is no way!

Freddy, you exclude yourself from the faith by demanding that those in the circle of your influence keep rules in order to be in the “in crowd.” Speaking of that, I think that's a big part of your problem. Your position necessarily moves the glory away from God and

to the men who keep your rules. How can God get the glory—which, by the way, was a major position of all of the apostles—when you have set up a merit system in which people will receive adulation for the work they do? This takes the rightful focus off God and puts it on men. We shouldn't live to please men but God, who has given us His Spirit.

My hope is that you will change your attitude and come to the source of life. Only Jesus can give the kind of freedom that I'm sure even you desire. Believe me, you would appreciate the gospel much more if you would take ego out of the equation and give Him the place He deserves—first place.

I pray that God would work in your life and lead you to change your mind about these things. I would warn the church that your positions are not Christian positions and that you need to come to Christ and let go of the legalism that motivates you.

Sincerely,

Brother Teddy Truthful

Some of you may think that the letter is a bit harsh. Isn't it too judgmental to give Freddy such a lashing? No. Because not only does he need to be warned, but those whom he influences need the same medicine. It's one thing to hold false beliefs, and another to promulgate them to deceive others.

Galatians is a red flag book. It is a harsh book. Galatians is the only epistle of Paul's where he doesn't praise the church before he gets into the body of his writing. On the other hand, those who are liberated from all forms of legalism are set free through a book like this because it emphasizes our freedom through Jesus. Jesus is the Great Liberator. He has set us free from sin and the law and death and any man who would add to the gospel.

Enjoy the book of Galatians. It just may change your life. That's my prayer for you.

God's blessings can come after a rebuke,
Pastor Steve



“The Verse That Changed My Life”

September 16 - Galatians 2:11- 3:9

I think most people have a watershed moment that shapes the rest of their life at some time or another. Sometimes these experiences can be very detrimental, and at other times they can have a fantastic impact. Maybe you met someone who influenced you so profoundly that your life was never the same. Maybe it was the day you met your future spouse, or when you entered the military. Maybe it was when you proved yourself at something, like a college class, or an athletic event, or the ability to give up a bad habit.

When did the biggest change in your life occur? Is it associated with something positive or negative? When you think about it, does it still bring back emotions and senses that arouse strong memories in you? Have you spent a good deal of your life trying to avoid thinking about that moment? Do you need a boost in order to get over a memory that is more crippling than helpful? If so, I hope my experience with God’s Word will have a positive impact on your heart and bring some healing where a wound still festers.

A few years after I had given my life to Christ I found a Scripture memory system that challenged me to memorize a good number of Bible verses, 60 in all. The key to the system was review. You didn’t go on to a new section of verses until you memorized the others word-perfectly. I started off with the verse about being a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). Then I got to Galatians 2:20. It seemed to be a long one and I felt my resolve being challenged as soon as I read through it the first time. I tackled it one phrase at a time and in a few days I had it down. I was bugging everyone around me to test me. I’d meet someone on the street and say, “Hey, buddy,” and give him my card, “test me on this Bible verse, would you?”

Mission accomplished, and off I went to memorize the next one and the next one and so on. I had no big expectations, I was just happy to be learning

a few key Bible verses. I hoped they would give me a framework in order to understand the Bible. Each day I would spend some time learning the new verse on my schedule and I would also review the verses I had already learned. It was a challenge, but I felt like it was having a good impact on me so I continued this process for some weeks.

One day I was strolling down the boulevard in my hometown, on an errand of some kind; I had a bit of time before I would reach where I was going. Then it happened. Galatians 2:20 was rolling around in my mind.

“I have been crucified with Christ... I have been crucified with Christ...hum, I have been crucified with Christ...nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me...I have been crucified with Christ.”

At that moment I believed it: I, like Paul, had been crucified with Christ. It gave me a peace and assurance that I had never experienced before. It was a spiritual experience so closely tied to God’s Word that one moment I thought one way about God and my life, and at the next moment I felt very different about God and my life. I was experiencing the power of the Truth of God to change a person’s life. From that moment on I felt so much more deeply in love with God and in tune with His purposes for my life.

Of course the verse says even more. It points out that Christ lives in the believer and it highlights that Christ loves me in a special way: He loves me so much that He would die for me. This verse was my watershed. It formed the basis for my future study of the Bible. To me, it was the pinnacle of the Biblical landscape. I could run with it and communicate it with others. It made sense. I needed to have been crucified with Christ, or the sin problem would be too tough for me. I couldn’t battle sin on my own, and I knew I needed a savior. “I have been crucified with Christ...”

I have since gone on to study this verse and the

book of Galatians in the Greek New Testament. That work has only strengthened my resolve that Christ does love me and is in me. Paul’s strong words to the Galatian church are in response to men, particularly Judaizers (men who said that the cross was not enough but that to be saved you had to keep perfectly the law of Moses and be circumcised), who came in to nullify the grace of God. Paul would not relent for a minute. He stood his ground and let them know that only Christ could save a person and that attempting to keep the law would be a losing proposition.

There is something profoundly important about letting the Words of Christ circulate through you. This practice has life-changing consequences. It will give life to your spiritual man like nothing else. Would you join me today in making His Word first place in our lives?

He loves you and gave His life for you. Meditate on these things.

God’s blessings sometimes come unexpectedly,
Pastor Steve



“Prisoners Of Sin”

September 17 - Galatians 3: 10-25

God has wired creation to glorify Him, and man has been trying to rewire it for centuries and centuries. The problem is that the more man tries to make life human-centered, the more he short-circuits the Manufacturer’s design.

People wonder why it’s so hard to make life work. As soon as they get one problem apparently resolved, pop, there’s another one. Man strives to create a world where all is well and happiness is the prevailing feeling. Then the morning headlines remind him that life on this planet is laced with unsolvable problems.

For example, the problem of death continues to haunt us. Yes, we tend to live longer these days because of the advances of modern medicine, but the truth is that we will all still die. That is a problem to be reckoned with. The more we try to advance life and health, the more frustrated we get when we realize the destiny of all men. I recently did a funeral where the son said of his deceased mother, “She lived as long as she could.” To me that says much. We would all love to keep living; the problem is that in the end we run out of gas.

Of course, this is where the good news of faith in

Christ gives us hope for this life and the life to come. The Bible makes it clear that we will all keep living even after we die. The question is whether we will live in Christ’s kingdom or outside of it. Faith in the work of Christ is the answer to the death problem. According to Paul, this work was a work of condemnation, in which He was cursed so that we wouldn’t have to be. That is what makes Jesus really good news.

On the other hand, when man gets into the control box and begins to reconnect the wires to other circuits, then the intended original purpose is eschewed and the result is chaos. God intended man to walk with Him and have a relationship with Him. Man went his own way and created gods in his own image. God intended for men to love one another and learn to get along. Man has sought autonomy and has walked over his fellow man in order to accomplish his own selfish pursuits. God intended for man to have a rich, abundant life and be in harmony with his Creator. Man has sought to live apart from his Creator and live by his own rules in order to find his own way. The results have been disastrous.

Paul says that “the Scripture declares that the

whole world is a prisoner of sin." Man doesn't have a knowledge problem or a philosophy problem or a money problem or an oil problem—man has a sin problem. I realize that we beat this subject like a dead horse while we moved through Romans, but here again Paul reiterates for the sake of the Galatians the all-important teaching that man is captive to sin.

We are all P.O.S.'s. We are prisoners of sin. In Romans 7 Paul made it clear that sin dwells in our mortal flesh and brings us into captivity on a daily basis; what we would like to do, we don't do, and what we would like not to do, we do. Only through Christ's deliverance can we experience freedom from the bondage of sin, which will enslave us all of our lives unless we commit ourselves to Christ and see ourselves in Him. Even then, our weakness in the flesh is a constant reminder of what used to hold us captive, because the flesh is weak and often succumbs to its temptations.

The lure of the flesh will constantly challenge our freedom in Christ. The flesh will pull us back into bondage and try to take us captive in our mind or

body, so that we become ineffective in our service to the Lord. The law is like sin's prison guard, meant to remind us of the offenses we commit, landing us in sin's domain.

God's promise of forgiveness and life through Christ did not come through law. The promise was given as God's guarantee to those who would put their faith in Jesus. Now we are no longer under the watchful and glaring eye of the law, because we have been acquitted by the work of Jesus on the cross. Essentially, we have been justified by faith. Remember, justified means to be declared righteous. That truth is our ticket out of the cell of sin.

Has a certain sin been getting you down lately? Are you feeling somewhat hopeless because certain sins remind you of a great big metal door slamming behind you? Do not despair. God's key of faith and forgiveness will bring you out into the open pastures where the Good Shepherd will restore your soul.

God's blessings come through faith,
Pastor Steve

I am driven into silence because I am weary of its hold on me. It's hard to talk about; it is so deeply personal and we fear we may be misunderstood if the cat were to be pulled from the bag.

Being set free from guilt is an inward job. You can't just decide to feel better about those haunting feelings you have. Attending church regularly, balancing the scales with good works or repeating some motto will not dissolve the problem as quickly as you'd like. I think guilt could be the factor in most cases of drug and alcohol addiction or any other addiction that takes your mind off of the real issue. Guilt is tenacious. It shadows your steps and talks to you at the most inopportune times. You can be skating through a day without a care in the world and then bam, there's your familiar enemy right on your heels.

One of the truths made evident over and over throughout the Bible is that the Holy Spirit will apply the Scripture to our lives in such a way that we can find true inward freedom from the "demons" that upset us. The book of Galatians is a good example of this. Galatians is a reader's digest of Romans, so I don't feel as inclined to dissect it as thoroughly as we did in Romans. I would suggest that you go back and re-read Romans for a reminder of the great work of Christ that justifies us before God. I do want to emphasize that the Spirit is working in our lives and He is able to make the truths of the Word so effective in us that we will begin to experience the liberation of His power. Remember in Acts that the Spirit was given so that the church could have power and become witnesses to the effectiveness of the gospel. The Spirit illuminates the truths of the gospel so that we will rely not on ourselves and our methods, but on Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Let's look at a couple of word pictures in Isaiah and compare it with what Paul is saying in Galatians. It just so happens that in today's reading we have a clear example of the continuity of Scripture. In other words, what Isaiah says so parallels Paul, who wrote Galatians approximately 750 years after Isaiah that it appears that they were written by one and the same author. Well, in a way they were. It was God's inspiration that produced both books. "All Scripture is God-breathed..." Paul writes to Timothy, so it should not surprise us that the books have an uncanny one-

ness. God's Word is like no other collection of books on the planet. No wonder it has been a best-seller throughout the centuries. It alone bears the stamp of God's design and skill. Peter said that he and his companions who witnessed the works and words of Jesus were carried along, as if by wind, as they penned the holy Word.

Isaiah says that the Redeemer will "blot out" our transgressions and that He will remember our sins no more. Both of these truths are something only God could do. Can you forget some hurtful thing that another has done to you? I regularly hear people say, "I can forgive but I cannot forget." You might not be able to, but God can. Also, God is the only one who can forgive sins. Take a look at Mark Chapter 2 and see that Jesus took this privilege on Himself. He forgave the sins of others.

The imagery of blotting out something is vivid. If there was a list of your sins somewhere, let's say in God's back pocket, He could take it out and accuse you of any number of things on that list. In other words, He has the dope on you. He knows the things you've done publicly and privately. He could really throw the book at you. But what if God blotted out the list and made the offenses indistinguishable?

Listen to how Paul puts it in Colossians: "And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross," (2:13,14). Here the Bible says that He set it aside and nailed it to the cross. Isaiah says that He also blotted it out. I can't help but think that it was blotted out by the blood of Jesus. Peter says that we have been forgiven through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus (2 Peter 1). It is His own blood that blots out the list of guilt-producing sins that trip us up.

Second, God says through Isaiah: "I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist," (44:22). This word picture is especially poignant for those who have lived along the coast. It seems like every morning there are clouds and mist there. Then the afternoon comes and the yucky weather gives way to wonderful warmth. God says that He removes our sins like that. So the next time



"Redemption And The Continuity Of Scripture"

September 18 - Isaiah 43,44; Galatians 3:26 - 4:20

Guilt is a mean bedfellow. We keep so many of our experiences hidden inside, and much of that secret stuff is making us guilt-ridden.

Once, while baptizing some fellow believers, I looked down into the water and saw a whole lot of nasty-looking stuff under the surface. Unfortunately, one of the persons being baptized saw it too and was terrified about coming up covered with the stuff. It turned out the pool was full of soot. Someone had made a bonfire the day before and the residue landed there. It really was gross.

Guilt is kind of like that. We look down in the pool of our hearts and minds and see—well—crud. We

know it's there and it bothers us, but what to do with it is a mystery. Most of us just avoid it by not looking down. When we get glimpses of it, like pangs of the heart, it hurts but, by and large, we just try to get used to it.

Does it affect our day-to-day living? You bet it does. It creates conflict and anxiety and the need to shift blame off of ourselves. We sometimes think that people are aware of it in us because it radiates and irritates. We reason that if it bothers us so much, others must be able to see it. Guilt affects the way I relate to others and to God. Sometimes it drives me to do things I would not ordinarily do and at other times

you see clouds or there is a mist in the air, wait for them to go away and then remember that God has removed your sins in this way.

Paul's teaching in Galatians parallels Isaiah. He says that Christ delivered us from the law by fulfilling the law and dying for us law-breakers who were guilty because of our law breaking. He says that we now have the Holy Spirit who confirms that we are children of God. This new relationship with God through the Spirit marks a vast difference from our former life of self-gratifying idolatry.

Guilt is associated with sin. Sin is the cause of

guilt. Until you believe that your personal sins are blotted out and driven away like a mist, then you will still be hounded by its force like a bull dog that won't let go. When you accept what Christ has done on the cross to buy you out of the slave market of sin, you'll experience lasting freedom from the chains of guilt. The Spirit may be speaking to you today to give up the guilt and let Him renew your relationship with the Father as a beloved son or daughter.

God's blessings solve the guilt problem,
Pastor Steve



“Get Rid Of The Slave Woman”

September 19 - Galatians 4:21-5:6

Most of us have learned the art of self-justification. We've all developed ways to sidestep our own wrongdoing.

I can remember one day when I was in the third or fourth grade I blew the paper from a straw into the air and was immediately sent to Table Eight. Table Eight was where the bad kids ended up. I cowered to the bench, horrified by my errant ways, and sat there with my tail between my legs until the bell rang.

I went home that day with a heavy conscience. I had broken the rules. I was a sinner. But maybe if I kept a low profile I could keep the truth from those who believed I was perfect. My grandparents thought I was an angel. My parents probably suspected something, knowing how I treated my sister from day to day, even though I could justify every crime against my sibling because of her obnoxious attitude toward me. What I didn't realize was that Mr. Fry, the principal, had already called my mom to give her a head's up on my criminal behavior. The hammer was about to fall, my mom said...when dad got home.

Let's face it—we all break the rules. We'd love to be the exception to that fact, but as soon as we raise our proud heads to declare that we have finally arrived, we fail in some way or another. We are back to looking for a way to tame our wild hearts. We only wanted to find peace and happiness—that was why we ventured into the keeping of the law—but as soon as we got neck-deep we realized that we wouldn't be able to tread water in the deep end forever.

I once heard an interview with Dr. Laura Schlessinger. The interviewer asked her if she had a relationship with God, knowing that years before she had converted to orthodox Judaism. She answered that she did not have a relationship with God. That was a pretty shocking response. She had not found in that system of religion a way to have a relationship with God. Why? I suspect it is because she is both honest and a perfectionist, and so she would have to admit that the weight of keeping rules in order to feel accepted by God was too great a burden to bear. When you seek to know God on the basis of law, you fall short of knowing Him. He never intended it that

way. The law was only given to show us that we needed to humbly come to God and give our lives to Him, receive His forgiveness and walk with Him.

Paul uses an allegory to teach us about the contrast between the law and the gospel. An allegory is a teaching device that takes something from the lives of people and their circumstances to make a point about a truth that matches what's going on in their lives. Therefore, the people and/or events represent some truth that God wants to convey to us.

In this allegory the main characters are Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Hagar, and Ishmael. Paul says that Abraham and Sarah and Isaac represent God's promises that are to be received by faith, and Hagar and Ishmael represent the law because Hagar's son Ishmael was the result of man (in this case Abraham himself) trying to do God's will in his own way. God had promised Abraham a son. Because of their age, Sarah and Abraham didn't figure they would be able to produce a child. Abraham decides to fulfill the promise on his own by taking his handmaid Hagar and having a child with her. Sarah agrees. Once the baby is born the rivalry between the women becomes fierce and Hagar and Ishmael are sent packing. Sarah eventually gets pregnant and has the promised son, Isaac.

The law was given to Moses at Mount Sinai because of the people's propensity to move from faith in God to self-indulgent living. Thus the Ten Commandments are designed to bring us back to God; to move us in God's direction so that we will worship Him alone.

Ishmael was the result of his father's attempt to play God. We get the same result when we believe we can keep the whole law and find perfection and peace and ultimately please God. On the other hand,

Isaac was the result of a promise God had given, and represents the grace of God to an undeserving household.

The problem since the time of Isaac and Ishmael is that the two half-brothers have not stopped fighting. And so it is with those allegorically who cannot get along because they are in two separate camps. There are those who see their lives as self-justified. They think they consistently keep the law, and despise the other side. The others know they have broken the law, but lean on God's grace for justification. These folks understand that no person can keep the law perfectly. For if they could, then Jesus would not have had to come and die on the cross. And so the tension continues.

It was continuing in Galatia in Paul's day. There were those who were downplaying the cross and emphasizing rule-keeping. Paul said that this was a disastrous place to stand. He reasoned that if they stood in that spot they were falling from grace and nullifying the cross of Jesus.

Do you lean on the cross for your justification before God? Do you trust God's promises, believing that God sent Jesus into the world to save those who trust in Him? Or are you going 50/50? Do you think that somehow you will be able to help God out by adding to the work of Christ with your own works? If so, Paul says to watch out; what you are doing will only result in strife and frustration.

Let's cling tightly to the cross. We are only justified by faith in the finished work of Jesus on the cross. The rest of us will have to go to Table Eight.

God's blessings are by promise,
Pastor Steve

**“It Only Takes A Little”**

September 20 - Galatians 5:7-26

How many times has someone played with fire, only to result in mass destruction? It takes just a bit of something dangerous to create or ignite something much bigger.

There are times when we make bad choices and get bad results. Other times we sit on our hands, don't take any steps, and end up creating havoc by default. If we tolerate evil, for example, we may feel like things are A-OK, but in reality we may be on the brink of a big problem. Throughout the history of the church there have been trouble-makers who have come in to undo the faith of some. If leaders in the church had not stopped them, they could have created a tidal wave of bad thinking and behavior. Tolerating wrongdoing is tantamount to acquiescing to its outcome.

Fear sometimes paralyzes us from standing up and speaking the truth about a situation. We know we ought to say something, but our nervous stomachs tell us to avoid the issue, that it would be easier if we minded our own business. Remember back in I Corinthians 5, where Paul had to expel the immoral person from their midst because the church was tolerant of his behavior? Paul couldn't believe that they would allow such corruption. He was not afraid to take the ball and deal with an issue that could have far-reaching influences on Christ's church. In the context of that problem, Paul quotes the same idea that we have in our reading today. He says that if sin is tolerated, sooner or later it will spread to every extremity of the Body.

This same principle is true when false teachings come into the church. A distortion of the gospel would result in ineffective ministry and the weakening of Christ's church, which is built on the confession of Peter: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Getting Jesus wrong is no small problem and Paul knew it. He also was well aware of what the legalism of the Pharisees would do if it was allowed to enter. Pretty soon church members would be detoured from Jesus, walking down a

road of self-righteousness that would lead to a denial of the Faith. To Paul, this was a frontal attack on the gospel and the freedom it produces in a person's life. He took a stand against it.

Why is legalism so attractive? Because it lends itself to the flesh. It creates an avenue for people to boast in themselves. It feeds the ego. If I can earn status with God and men, then I will have power over other men. That is the attitude a legalist has. The legalist is also happy with the way he can win over others to his foolish views. It amazes me what people will fall for, even in the face of blatant wrong. Remember Jim Jones and the tragedy in Jonestown? This man led hundreds of people from California overseas, and they all ended up dead.

I also think people want to feel like part of the in-crowd. Some will do anything to win the approval of others. In a legalistic religious system they can find acceptance by conforming to the rules of the group. The problem with this is that it distorts the Gospel. It automatically takes the emphasis off of Jesus and puts it on the people. It also creates a hierarchy based on how well individuals do compared to the rest. If you are the star rule-keeper then you will stand out. Note "you will stand out;" it is at that point about you and not about Jesus. Let me remind you that God will not share His glory with anyone.

One last observation before we go for today. When I talk to people in Christ's church, I have seen a trend to focus too much on issues, ethics and morality and not enough on Jesus. Christianity is about an adoration of Jesus and a relationship with Jesus and a focus on Him in the gospel. It is not primarily about presidential races, right and wrong choices and the value of being chaste. There is no doubt that those things have a bearing on our life and impact us in many ways. But they are not to be emphasized apart from the gospel, which is Christ crucified and resurrected.

God's blessings are gospel oriented,
Pastor Steve

**“I'm Out Of This World”**

September 21 - Galatians 6: 1-18

The world says, "Might makes right."
God says, "Through the weakness of Christ's gruesome death, you are righted."

The world says, "Material gain is true gain."
God says, "Taking up your cross is true gain."

The world says, "What you have in this life is all you have."
God says, "The cross gives you the hope of eternal life."

The world says, "Keep the rules, be perfect, and you will prosper."
God says, "Believe in the cross and you will be forgiven."

The world says, "Man can achieve ultimate happiness on his own."
God says, "Through the cross I have made the way for a long happiness."

The world says, "Earn status, impress others, achieve success."
God says, "Deny self, take up your cross, follow Jesus."

The world says, "Praise the accomplishment of the human spirit."
God says, "Boast in the cross of Christ; this world is not your home."

The cross points up and out. The cross was God's doing. God had it planned from all eternity. He orchestrated the whole affair. Jesus' words to Pilate can be heard echoing down the corridors of time, "You have no authority over me unless it's given to you from above." God did for us what we could have never in a million lifetimes done for ourselves.

Paul, the once ardent self-promoting religious guy, is now saying that the cross of Jesus is his only reference for boasting. Of all the things Paul could have harped on to help us draw near to God and gain an appreciation for Him, he chose the cross. He could have majored on athletics. Athletics have always been a big part of world culture. He could have focused on politics. Maybe if governments managed things properly, we could live a better life. Paul could have emphasized religious devotion and ministry to the poor. There is no doubt that some people have a rougher time in this life than others. He could have stressed the importance of miracles and dwelt on the need for more manifestations of God's power. He could have camped on a hundred different things. He does talk about these subjects in his writings, but his main thing is Christ crucified. We saw that in his ministry in Corinth and we see it here in Galatians. It is a theme woven not only in Paul's letters but throughout the Bible. It runs like a scarlet thread from Genesis to Revelation, so that we might forever be reminded that God's plan was guaranteed to succeed. It, and it alone, could bring a person to the holy God of the Bible.

The cross, despised by the world, was the one thing that occupied Paul's mind most of all. It separated him from the world. The world could not understand how the death of Jesus could have any meaningful significance. To the world, the cross was just a tragedy. To Paul, the cross was the object of his salvation and the hope for eternal life. Paul considered this truth to be the wedge between himself and the world. It was the reason he no longer considered himself a part of the global crowd. The cross saved him; it was the final blow by which he died to the world's system. He could no longer get as excited about self-righteous sorts of things. No longer did he see self-promotion as important. No longer did he really care how others saw him.

This mentality is the reason Paul encourages his readers to keep doing the good things that will reflect a grateful heart. He says to do good to all. This echoes Jesus' words to "let your light shine before all men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven," (Matthew 5:16). Gratitude and thankfulness are much better motives for serving than guilt and duty. We tend to put our heart into service when we want to please the one we are serving.

For Paul, the cross was the focal point from which all spiritual life flowed. Morality and ethics and labor for its own sake pale in comparison to a life of virtue and character pouring forth from a heart transformed by the cleansing blood of Jesus. His blood changes the fabric of our lives and impacts the steps we take.

God's blessings drip down from the cross,
Pastor Steve