

October 25, 2026

A SOBERING VERSE AND THE GRACE OF CHRIST

Galatians 1:6-10

(2 of 19 in a series through Galatians)

For each of us sitting here this morning and for us as a church, I think Galatians 1:6 is one of the most sobering verses that we can read in all of Scripture. That verse marks the beginning of the body of Paul's letter to the Galatians, but it doesn't sound like the beginning of any of Paul's other letters. In most of Paul's letters, Paul says something like we read in 1 Thessalonians 1:2—"We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers" as he starts the main part of the letter. Even in his letter to the Corinthians—with how messed up they were—after his greeting, Paul begins the main part of that letter, saying, "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that was given you in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor 1:4). But when he begins the main body of his letter to the Galatians, it's nothing like that. Rather, he writes, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (v. 6). Paul writes with an urgency that is unmatched in his other letters. This is clearly a serious matter about what was going on with these Galatian believers. But why do I say that it's one of the most sobering verses in all of Scripture those of us sitting here this morning?

Here's why. Galatians 1:6 is a reminder to us that good churches and godly people can go astray—even turning away from the gospel itself—and that this going astray can happen quickly. I say this because only a short while has passed from the time that Paul planted these churches until the time that he writes this letter. Most commentators think there's only about a year or so between the planting of the Galatian churches and the writing of this letter. But even if we didn't know that bit of history, Paul notes that the speed at which these churches have lost their way is astonishing to him, as he writes that he's astonished that they've "so quickly" deserted the Lord to chase after a false gospel.

Now, perhaps we're tempted to think that these churches and these believers were in a bad place right out of the gate. I mean, maybe Paul cut corners in planting these churches so that they never really had a time that things were going well, and so their going astray was easily foreseen. But Paul explicitly notes otherwise. He writes in 5:7, "You were running well." In other words, these were professing believers, making up good churches, that so quickly turned away from the gospel that Paul can only describe his reaction to what is going on as one of astonishment. He's shocked at what's happening. Therefore, if these Galatian churches were healthy and made up of godly people, then it's a reminder to every reader of this letter that none of us—as individuals or as a church—is immune from losing our way and turning away from the gospel, quickly.

That should be sobering to us. I mean, it's not enough to say, "Well, we've had a good track record of faithfulness." The Galatians, Paul tells us, were running well. Nor can we say, "Well, we have faithful pastors." Paul and Barnabas not only planted these churches, but the elders were

hand-picked by them (Acts 14:23). In other words, there's no room for us to assume that we couldn't go astray from the gospel just as the Galatians had done here. So, what do we then do? What do we do to strengthen ourselves to help fight against walking astray? Is there anything we can do to help prevent ourselves and this church from going astray and potentially even abandoning the gospel itself like the Galatians did? I believe there are things we can do, and we can gather what some of these things are from these verses in Galatians 1:6-10.

As Paul notes his astonishment, he doesn't stop there. He gives notes throughout that would help the Galatians from giving themselves over to this false teaching wholeheartedly. And these notes will help us as well. What then does Paul say? Let me note three things. First, Paul reminds his hearers that there is only one gospel.

There is only one gospel

I noted last week that Paul opened his letter by laying out the central elements in the gospel as he mentioned that Christ gave himself up (i.e. died) for our sins and rose from the grave on the third day. When he wrote to the Corinthians—in the text we heard read earlier in the service—he made it even more explicit, writing, “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved . . . that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures” (1 Cor. 15:1-4). That's the gospel, the good news that Christ lived, died, and was raised and that we can benefit from his work by placing our faith in him. Those who turn from all forms of self-reliance and rebellion and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ by faith are justified, which is to say, declared righteous by God. This is what we preach. We proclaim Christ as the crucified and risen Lord and call people to repent and believe so that they might be saved. That's the gospel.

Now, notice, when Paul opens this body of his letter to the Galatians, he writes, “I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel,” and then he adds, “Not that there is another one” (vv. 6-7). Paul wants the Galatians to know that there is one gospel, one message of good news, one means whereby we might be saved. There aren't other gospels out there. There aren't multiple paths to find salvation. There's one gospel. That's our starting place, but let's continue to build. Second, we can say that if anyone alters this gospel in any way, we should consider that person condemned.

If anyone alters this gospel in any way, we should consider that person condemned

After noting there's no other gospel, Paul continues, “But there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Jesus Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (vv. 7-8). Then, if you didn't catch it the first time, Paul repeats this declaration, saying, “As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (v. 9).

Now, there's much to work through here, so let's start with the very first element in verse 7. Paul tells the Galatians that there are some who want to trouble them by distorting the gospel. What exactly were these people doing who were distorting the gospel? Well, it seems that these individuals distorting the gospel were arguing that faith in the crucified and risen Lord wasn't enough. They were arguing that in addition to faith, one is justified on the basis of doing the works of the law, especially being circumcised.

We know that because if you continue in the letter, Paul addresses this precise distortion of the gospel, writing, "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law" (5:4). Then, he adds in 6:12, "It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised." Therefore, as we said in our first sermon in this study, these individuals were likely affirming that you have to place your faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. But then they were adding that you also have to do some works of the law, including circumcision. And Paul is showing us that if you add works to the gospel as the basis for us being declared righteous before God, then you're distorting the gospel, making it no gospel at all.

The key reason for this is because if you take the gospel of grace and add in some works, it's no longer the gospel of grace. Paul explicitly says that in Romans 11:6, writing, "If it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise, grace would no longer be grace." I think this is why Paul writes in verse 6 that the Galatians were "deserting him who called you *in the grace of Christ*." They were turning away from believing that we were saved by grace through faith to believing their works were a part of the basis for their justification and, thus, walking away from grace. If the gospel becomes all that Jesus has done plus any portion of our contribution, then it's no longer the gospel.

But the second note we need to see is that Paul says that anyone who distorts this gospel in any way—even if it is Paul himself or an angel from heaven—that person should be considered condemned before God. That's what it means to be "accursed."

So, let's spell this out simply. If anyone comes along and says, "Yes, you're saved by placing your faith in the crucified and risen Lord to be saved, but you also have to contribute these good works (whatever they might be)," Paul is telling us that we should consider that person not to be a believer. In fact, Paul will say that if he or an angel from heaven were to show up and preach anything different than the gospel Paul had preached, we should consider that person accursed. And, since Paul says it repeatedly, let me say it once more: anyone who preaches a gospel contrary to the one Paul had preached to the Galatians should be considered condemned.

Now, I don't have to tell you that there are a lot of people out there who preach false gospels, distorting the gospel just the way the Judaizers were, troubling these Galatian believers. For example, the Roman Catholic church, though it's a bit convoluted in doing so, distorts the gospel a number of ways in this regard: not recognizing that God demands perfect obedience and then suggesting that after receiving grace we can then work to gain merit and earn salvation (to name

a couple).¹ In the end the Roman Catholic church mixes together faith plus works as the basis for our salvation, thus distorting the gospel Scripture puts forth. And though any individual Roman Catholic person may rightly understand the gospel and be saved, trusting in Christ alone for the fullness of their salvation, that's not what the Roman Catholic church teaches. It preaches a false gospel that will lead people to condemnation, and that's why Paul says that one who distorts the gospel should be considered condemned. It's why the Protestant Reformation was necessary. The gospel had been distorted just like was happening among the Galatians so that what was preached was no gospel at all.

And it's important that we recognize this as a church. One prime situation in which a church could be tempted to compromise and distort the gospel is when we feel persecution or cultural attack. Let me explain what I mean. When the culture begins to strongly attack the things that Scripture proclaims as good, true, and right, it's nice to find out that we have allies. So, for example, right now there are many groups that profess Christ and side with us in promoting Christian policies in our culture, but they preach a distorted gospel. And so the temptation can be to minimize the gospel or downplay their distortions of the gospel because they are such dear allies in cultural matters. But we must not do so.

A few years back, Albert Mohler (president of Southern Seminary) was invited to speak on some cultural issue at BYU. Now, Brigham Young University is obviously affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (or Mormonism)—a group which perverts Christian doctrine in numerous ways, including the gospel itself. Yet, they are allies in a number of cultural battles, which is why they'd asked Mohler to come speak. And I'll never forget reading the transcript of Mohler's words from that day. He said to that group at BYU, "I am not here because I believe we are going to heaven together. I do not believe that. I believe that salvation comes only to those who believe and trust only in Christ and in his substitutionary atonement for salvation. I believe in justification by faith alone, in Christ alone. I love and respect you as friends, and as friends we would speak only what we believe to be true, especially on matters of eternal significance. . . . I do not believe that we are going to heaven together, but I do believe we may go to jail together."² That's the kind of boldness that we need, even with our cultural allies in this hostile world because Paul makes it unmistakably clear that anyone who proclaims a distorted gospel is condemned.

But that raises a question, doesn't it? How do we know the gospel that Paul preached? I mean, if the Pope preaches one gospel, Martin Luther preached another, and others preach still another, how do we know the true gospel that Paul was proclaiming?

¹ See Gregg Allison, *Roman Catholic Theology and Practice: An Evangelical Assessment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 413-50.

² See: https://albertmohler.com/2013/10/21/a-clear-and-present-danger-religious-liberty-marriage-and-the-family-in-the-late-modern-age-an-address-at-brigham-young-university/?utm_source=chatgpt.com. Accessed on October 20, 2026.

The comforting answer, of course, is that he wrote it down. We have it preserved in the Scripture. We've already read his clear declaration of the gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, and we'll study his teaching of justification by faith alone throughout this letter—leaving us without a doubt that we're justified by faith alone. In other words, the Scripture preserves what Paul and the other apostles were preaching as the gospel.

This means that at any point, you and I can evaluate all claims, especially claims concerning the gospel, in light of Scripture. The Bible doesn't tell us to merely rely on any man. The expectation of the Bible isn't that infallible men would arise in every generation who could always be trusted to proclaim truth. In fact, Paul told the Galatians not even to trust Paul himself or an angel from heaven if they came preaching another gospel. His point, obviously, isn't that he anticipated departing from the gospel or God sending an angel to deceive all of us. His point in giving such extreme examples as himself or an angel from heaven is to show that our supreme authority for knowing the gospel isn't rooted in any person—no matter how trustworthy that person might seem—but in Scripture itself, which provides for us the apostolic gospel. This is one reason why the Reformers upheld Scripture alone as the supreme authority for all things. And if anyone departs from this Scriptural gospel, that person is to be considered condemned.

So, the first two aids we have in guarding ourselves from going astray, even from the gospel itself, is to recognize there's only one gospel and anyone who adds or takes away from it or distorts it in any other way is condemned and should be recognized as such.

But why would anyone be tempted at all then to distort, or pervert, or manipulate the gospel? One answer to that question leads us to our final point and final aid in persevering in holding to the one, true, apostolic gospel. One of the greatest threats to gospel compromise is a desire to please man.

One of the greatest threats to gospel compromise is a desire to please man

After Paul repeats his statement saying that if anyone preaches a different gospel, he should be considered condemned, Paul says, "For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ." (v. 10a).

This statement can feel odd and disjointed from what's been said to this point, but it's clearly connected with what comes before because it begins with the word "for," suggesting Paul is grounding what he just said in the previous verses in this statement. And my guess is that Paul is saying that the reason he preached the gospel he received from the Lord instead of altering it in any way (like the Judaizers were doing) is because his motivation in ministry isn't to please any man but simply the Lord. That argument will especially make sense when we get to verse 11 next week. But I think Paul's questions and statement in verse 10 are also a reminder to us that we will feel pressure to compromise the gospel or to accept a distorted gospel because of our desire to please man.

Let me illustrate this by tying it to what we just talked about in regards to verses 8-9. Imagine you were accompanying Dr. Mohler on that trip to BYU, having meals with those to whom he'd be speaking, and enjoying your time with these people, and then he showed you his speech prior to giving it, and you saw that paragraph that begins, "I am not here because I believe we are going to heaven together. I do not believe that." What would be your response? Would you be tempted to say, "Are you sure you want to say that? That's going to make everyone uncomfortable. People aren't going to leave thinking you're gracious and kind"? If so, it may be because the desire to please man and have man's approval is stronger than your desire to please God and say what would receive God's approval. And, let's be honest. We can all feel that temptation to want man's approval. We can all want man to be pleased with us, even at the cost of dishonoring or disobeying the Lord.

But Paul reminds us that these things will often be at odds. You can't exclusively seek man's approval and simultaneously seek God's approval. At times, they'll be in conflict. This is why Paul ends verse 10, saying, "If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ" (v. 10b). You can't be bent of getting man's approval and faithfully obey Jesus. And one reason that you can't do that is that Jesus tells us that anyone who distorts the gospel in any way should be seen as condemned before God. And, as Mohler noted, the most loving thing you can do for one who is condemned before God and make sure he understands he's condemned before God. But that loving thing can certainly feel uncomfortable and will certainly give great offense to others.

So, you'd think that I could end this by addressing those of us who are people pleasers. But the reality is that I think we can all be prone to that. I don't think there's a subset of people pleasers among us. It's just that some of us can be a little more prone to that than others. But, as individual Christians and as a church, we need to be on guard against wanting man's approval more than God's because if we allow our desire for man's approval to become greater than our desire to be honoring to the Lord, then it won't be long before we walk away from the truth of God's Word. It won't be long before we compromise the gospel to get man's approval or accept a distorted gospel so as not to offend the one proclaiming it. May God forbid.

So, this morning, as we look at Galatians 1:6-10, we're reminded of a sobering reality. Good churches and godly people can quickly go astray, even abandoning the gospel itself. But if we remember that there's only one true gospel (which is recorded in Scripture), understand that anyone who alters this gospel should be considered condemned, and seek to be pleasing to God instead of trying to please man, then we should find ourselves strengthened to walk in faithfulness and to hold fast to the gospel in the midst this world. And the one who gave himself for us, I trust, will strengthen us to that end. So let's come with thanksgiving for his grace as we partake of the table this morning. Amen.