

HOLD ON TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

1 Paul, an apostle—not sent by men nor through any man, but sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—²and all the brothers who are with me, to the churches of Galatia: ³Grace and peace to you, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ ⁴who gave himself for our sins, so that he might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you by grace, [and turning] to a different gospel—⁷that is not another [gospel]. Certain men are troubling you and seeking to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven were to preach a gospel other than the gospel we preached to you, let him be accursed! ⁹As we said before, so now I say again, If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one you received, let him be accursed. ¹⁰Am I now seeking the approval of men, or of God? Or am I seeking to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.

¹¹Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin;¹²for neither did I receive it from a man, nor was it taught to me. On the contrary, I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. ¹³You have heard about my former way of life in Judaism, that I persecuted the church of God with great intensity and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries from my own country, being extremely zealous for the traditions of my forefathers. ¹⁵But when God, who appointed me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might preach him to the [Gentile] nations, I immediately refrained from conferring with [mortal] men. ¹⁷Nor did I go up to Jerusalem to confer with those who were apostles before me; on the contrary, I went out to Arabia, and after that I returned again to Damascus. ¹⁸Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem in order to become acquainted with Cephas, and I stayed with him for fifteen days. ¹⁹But I did not see any of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother. ²⁰Now concerning the things I am writing to you, I swear before God that I am not lying. ²¹Then I went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²²But I was still unknown [personally] to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³But they kept hearing [the report]: The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he formerly tried to destroy; ²⁴and they glorified God because of me. (Gal. 1:1-24)

A note on the Scripture text that accompanies each individual message: The *American Standard Version* and the *New International Version*, along with the original Greek and Hebrew, have been used in an effort to achieve the greatest degree of accuracy and clarity. Where words or phrases have been added to the original text in an effort to better express its meaning, those words or phrases have usually been indicated by means of [brackets].

Introduction

In the spring of 1996, 110 Christian leaders gathered for a four-day conference at Cambridge, Massachusetts. They came together out of concern that the Christian church of today has departed from the gospel. As one of them commented,

The faithfulness of the evangelical church in the past contrasts sharply with its unfaithfulness in the present ... The evangelical world today is losing its biblical fidelity, moral compass and missionary zeal ... We have been influenced by the “gospels” of our secular culture, which are no gospels. (James Montgomery Boice)

As a result of their prayers and deliberations, these concerned Christian leaders composed a four-page document called “The Cambridge Declaration.” The Declaration starts out by saying,

Today the light of the Reformation has been significantly dimmed ... Because of this crisis and because of our love of Christ, his gospel and his church, we endeavor to assert anew our commitment to the central truths of the Reformation and of historic evangelicalism.

The Declaration calls the church to return and refocus and recommit herself to the historic Christian faith as expressed in the great principles of the Reformation, such as:

CHRIST ALONE

As evangelical faith becomes secularized, its interests have been blurred with those of the culture ... Christ and his cross have *been* moved from the center of our vision. We reaffirm that our salvation is accomplished by the mediatorial work of the historic Christ alone. His sinless life and substitutionary atonement alone are sufficient for our justification and reconciliation to the Father.

GRACE ALONE

Unwarranted confidence in human ability is a product of fallen human nature. This false confidence now fills the evangelical world from the self-esteem gospel to the health and wealth gospel ... this silences the doctrine of justification regardless of the official commitments of our churches. We reaffirm that in salvation we are rescued from God’s wrath by His grace alone. It is the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit that brings us to Christ by releasing us from our bondage to sin and raising us from spiritual death to spiritual life.

FAITH ALONE

Justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This is the article by which the church stands or falls. Today this article is often ignored, distorted or sometimes even denied ... We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ's righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God's perfect justice.

Such are the concerns of these contemporary Christian leaders as they view the church today. The Apostle Paul expressed the same concern for the churches of Galatia:

I am astonished that you are so quickly turning away from the one who called you by grace, and are turning to a different gospel,—⁷which is not another gospel. Certain men are troubling you and seeking to distort the gospel of Christ. (Gal. 1:6-7)

We must be alert to the danger of allowing ourselves to be drawn away from the gospel of Christ unto a different teaching. The message of the Book of Galatians, especially as it is expressed in this opening chapter, is this: Hold on to the gospel of Christ, because any alternative to it is a deadly counterfeit.

I. Hold on to the Gospel of Christ, Because of Its Divine Origin (1:1,11-24)

In verse one Paul identifies himself as "*an apostle.*" That is to say, a special messenger or ambassador who has been commissioned to represent someone else and who is completely identified with the one whom he represents, note John 13:16,20, where our Lord Jesus declares,

I tell you the truth, a servant is not greater than his master; neither is a messenger [literally, an apostle] greater than the one who sent him ... ²⁰I tell you the truth, whoever receives anyone whom I send is receiving me; and whoever receives me is receiving the one who sent me (Jn. 13:16,20.)

Paul goes on to say that he, as an apostle is "*not sent by men or through any man.*" Paul was not appointed by the church or by the original apostles to be their apostle, nor was he ordained by them on behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ. "*But sent by Jesus Christ and God the Father.*" Paul was ordained directly by Christ Himself, note Acts 26:15-18, which reports Paul's testimony concerning the divine commission he received from the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus

Then I asked, Who are you, Lord? I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting, the Lord replied. ¹⁶Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and

what I will show you. ¹⁷I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you ¹⁸to open their eyes and turn them from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me. (Acts 26:15-18)

Furthermore, his calling to be an apostle of Christ was in accordance with the will and purpose of God the Father, as he explains in Galatians 1:15-16.

In verses 11-12 Paul testifies, *“Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin; ¹²for neither did I receive it from a man, nor was it taught to me. On the contrary, I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”* The gospel is *“not of human origin.”* Paul *“did not receive it from a man;”* this is a reference to oral tradition: the ancients passed down the wisdom of the ages to their students who were said to “receive” it and would then commit it to memory. Nor was Paul *“taught”* the gospel. The first century world had its own centers of learning, note, by way of example, Acts 19:9, which speaks of Paul *“reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus,”* an ancient learning center located in the city of Ephesus. But Paul makes clear that the gospel was not some new religious concept circulating around the academic centers of the day.

To repeat, the gospel is *“not of human origin.”* The good news of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ is not in any sense a human creation, invention, or conception. The gospel is totally foreign to the human mind and contrary to the human heart, note 1 Corinthians 1:18,23, where Paul declares, *“the doctrine of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing; but to us who are being saved it is the power of God ... ²³we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Gentiles.”* The gospel defines the human problem as being that of sin (moral violations of our Creator’s holy law.) The gospel declares that man is totally and utterly incapable of redeeming himself, by nature we are dead in our sins and trespasses. The gospel directs us to look to God alone and to humbly receive the provision of salvation He graciously offers us in His Son Jesus Christ. Referring to those who receive the salvation God offers in the gospel, the Apostle Paul writes, *“God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions he made us alive with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* (Eph. 2:4-5.)

Paul declares that he received the gospel *“through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Paul not only received a revelation **from** Jesus Christ, at which time Christ communicated to him the gospel, Paul received a revelation **of** Jesus Christ, at which time the Lord revealed His divine righteousness to Paul, convicted Paul of his own sinfulness, and offered salvation to Paul by means of faith in Himself, His righteousness and His sacrifice upon the cross of Calvary. Note Acts 22:3-14, a passage in which Paul presents his testimony concerning his experience on the road to Damascus:

*Then Paul said: ³“I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today. ⁴I persecuted the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison, ⁵as also the high priest and all the Council can testify. I even obtained letters from them to their brothers in Damascus, and went there to bring these people as prisoners to Jerusalem to be punished. ⁶About noon as I came near Damascus, suddenly a bright light from heaven flashed around me. ⁷I fell to the ground and heard a voice say to me, ‘Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?’ ⁸‘Who are you, Lord?’ I asked. ‘I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ⁹My companions saw the light, but they did not understand the voice of him who was speaking to me. ¹⁰‘What shall I do, Lord?’ I asked. ‘Get up,’ the Lord said, ‘and go into Damascus. There you will be told all that you have been assigned to do.’ ¹¹My companions led me by the hand into Damascus, because the brilliance of the light had blinded me. ¹²A man named Ananias came to see me. He was a devout observer of the law and highly respected by all the Jews living there. ¹³He stood beside me and said, ‘Brother Saul, receive your sight!’ And at that very moment I was able to see him. ¹⁴Then he said: **“The God of our fathers has chosen you to know his will and to see the Righteous One and to hear words from his mouth.”**” (Acts 22:3-14)*

Consider, too, Paul’s Christian testimony,

But much more than that, I regard all things as losses on account of the all-surpassing value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, because of whom I have suffered the loss of all things. Indeed, I regard all such things as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ, ⁹and be found in him—not having my own righteousness that is derived from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness that is from God [received] by faith—¹⁰so that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming conformed to his death, ¹¹that I may in some way attain the resurrection from the dead. (Phil. 3:8-11)

In verses 13-14 Paul presents a brief autobiographical sketch of his past life. His devotion to the religion of the Jews (i.e.; his life as a Pharisee) and his hostility against the gospel and the church of Jesus Christ were well known facts. This being the case, it becomes very evident that he did not receive his apostolic commission from the church nor was he taught by the original apostles. On the contrary, it took an act of God’s sovereign grace to turn him from the religion of the Jews to the salvation found in Jesus Christ alone, note Galatians 1:15-16, *“But when [God], who appointed me from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might preach him to the [Gentile] nations, I immediately refrained from conferring with [mortal] men.”* Note: From the very way he phrases it, it is evident that Paul had a deep awareness that he had been saved to serve God, and to do so in the capacity of being an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In verses 16b-24 Paul declares that, upon receiving his divine appointment to be an apostle of Jesus Christ, he diligently maintained his independence from men: I did not confer with flesh and blood ... I did not go to Jerusalem to confer with the original apostles ... instead, I went away into Arabia ... only after three years did I visit Jerusalem to make the acquaintance of Peter and John ... then I immediately departed for Syria and Cilicia ... I remained personally unknown to the churches of Judea. Paul initially maintained his independence from the original apostles not because he felt that he was superior to them, or because he felt that he did not need them, or because he desired to start his own churches. On the contrary, in the providence of God, Paul initially acted as he did in order to establish and maintain the integrity of his divine calling as an apostle of Christ. His initial separation from the original apostles showed that it was not they, but God, who had appointed Paul to be an apostle.

Let us hold on to the gospel of Christ, because it is of divine origin:

Now I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin; ¹²for neither did I receive it from a man, nor was it taught to me. On the contrary, I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Gal. 1:11-12)

II. Hold on to the Gospel of Christ, Because of What Only It Can Do (1:3-5)

“Grace and peace from God” are only found in Christ and only received through the gospel. *“Grace”* here is used in the sense of the spiritual blessing of God extended to us and bestowed upon us in Christ, note Ephesians 1:3 and 2:5-7,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms in Christ. (Eph. 1:3)

... even when we were dead in transgressions he made us alive with Christ, (by grace you have been saved,) ⁶and he raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms—in Christ Jesus. ⁷[He did] so in order that in the coming ages [of eternity] he might display the immeasurable riches of his grace [expressed] in kindness to us in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:5-7)

“Peace,” as used here, is a reference to personal peace of heart based upon legal peace with God, note Isaiah 40:1-2 and Romans 5:1,

Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. ²Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her affliction has come to an end, that her iniquity has been pardoned, that she has received from Jehovah’s hand double for all her sins. (Isa. 40:1-2)

Being therefore justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. (Rom. 5:1)

Our Lord Jesus Christ *“gave himself for our sins.”* Upon the cross of Calvary He offered Himself as the one perfect sacrifice to satisfy the justice of God so that through faith in Him we may be justified before God; that is to say, through faith in Christ we may be accepted, or acquitted, before God our Judge. Note Galatians 3:13 and 1 John 4:10,

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.” (Gal. 3:13)

This is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (1 Jn. 4:10) Note: A propitiation is the sacrifice that satisfies the divine justice and appeases the divine wrath of God.

Christ gave Himself for us *“so that he might deliver us from this present evil world.”* The purpose of Christ’s atoning work is to deliver us out of the realm of sin and make us holy before God; in other words, to sanctify us, setting us apart for God and making us holy like God, note Titus 2:13b-14, *“our Savior Jesus Christ; ¹⁴... gave himself for us, so that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people for his own possession, [a people] zealous for good works.”*

All of Christ work of redemption is *“according to the will of our God and Father.”* Salvation is accomplished by the person and work of Christ and it is by the initiative of God the Father, note 1 Corinthians 1:30-31,

It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—righteousness and sanctification and redemption; ³¹in order that it may be just as it has been written, “He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 1:30-31)

Let us hold on to the gospel of Christ, because of what only it can do. Only the gospel can provide grace (spiritual blessing), peace, justification (forgiveness and acceptance with God), and sanctification (progressive and final purification from sin.)

III. Hold on to the Gospel of Christ, Because Any Other Teaching is a Deadly Counterfeit (1:6-10)

In verse 6 the apostle expresses his astonishment that the Galatians were so quickly and easily forsaking the One who called them. Note that they were not merely forsaking a doctrine and teaching, but were forsaking their relationship with God. It is by means of the gospel that God the Father calls us out of spiritual darkness into His divine light, as the Apostle Peter teaches, *“you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people [appointed to be God’s] own possession, so that you might display the virtues of him who called you out of*

darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Pet. 2:9.) Furthermore, it is by means of the gospel that God the Father calls us into the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ: *"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord"* (1 Cor. 1:9.)

The Galatians were turning to a *"different gospel,"* which in fact was no gospel at all (vs. 6-7.) These churches had been exposed to a heretical teaching, which they were in danger of accepting as a substitute for the true gospel preached by the Apostle Paul. But this teaching was no gospel—it was no good news at all; on the contrary, it was a depressing and deadly counterfeit.

What exactly was this *"different gospel"*? Acts 15:1,5 provides us with the outline and origin of this heretical teaching:

Certain men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved ... ⁵Then certain men of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, stood up and said, It is necessary to circumcise them [i.e.; the Gentile converts] and to charge them to keep the law of Moses. (Acts 15:1,5)

This teaching maintained that the sacrament of circumcision and the use of the law were necessary as a means of meriting or earning one's salvation. This teaching maintained that one entered into the covenant community of God by means of the sacrament; thereupon one must endeavor to merit and maintain God's favor by means of one's personal observance of the law. In essence, this heresy, (and all other heresies,) denied the all-sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. It maintained that Christ was not fully sufficient and that Christ alone is insufficient to reconcile us to God. In contrast to such teaching note Hebrews 7:25, *"he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, because he always lives to make intercession for them."* In Hebrews 1:3 we read that our Lord Jesus Christ, *"after he had provided purification for sins, he sat down on the right hand of the Majesty in heaven"*—His posture of sitting indicates that His work is completed and is fully accepted by God His Father. This heretical teaching erroneously taught the capability of man to contribute to his salvation by the observance of religious rituals and by means of his own personal moral endeavor. In contrast to such teaching note Isaiah 64:6, *"All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. All of us shrivel up like a leaf; and, like the wind, our iniquities sweep us away."* This passage of Isaiah indicates that we are held captive by our sinful nature and are unable to make ourselves morally pure and acceptable before our holy God.

In verses 8-9, in no uncertain terms, the Apostle Paul pronounces an anathema (a curse) upon anyone who would propagate any teaching that is contrary to the gospel of Christ:

But even if we or an angel from heaven were to preach a gospel other than the gospel we preached to you, let him be accursed! ⁹As we said before, so now I say again, If anyone preaches to you a gospel other than the one you received, let him be accursed. (Gal. 1:8-9)

Let us hold on to the gospel of Christ, and never forsake it for a counterfeit:

Now, brothers, I remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you also received, on which also you stand, ²and by which you are saved—if you hold firm to the word we preached to you, otherwise you have believed in vain. ³I delivered to you as of first importance that which I also received, [namely,] that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; ⁴and that he was buried; and that he has been raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (1 Cor. 15:1-4)

Conclusion

Let us hold on to the gospel of Christ and reaffirm its great truths in our day, confessing together with the writers of “The Cambridge Declaration,”

We reaffirm that justification is by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. In justification Christ’s righteousness is imputed to us as the only possible satisfaction of God’s perfect justice.

May we personally know this saving truth in our hearts; may the apostles’ testimony be our testimony as well:

... knowing that a man is not justified by his observance of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ—even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by our observance of the law, because no [sinful] man shall be justified by his observance of the law. (Gal. 2:16)