

Title: Galatia, we have a problem
Text: Galatians 1.1-2.14
Theme: The big deal about legalism
Series: Galatians #1
Prop Stmt: When you try to add something to the gospel, you always end up with something less than the gospel.

Our text and therefore this sermon uses the word gospel quite a bit. I want to make certain that our understanding of that word is correct. That is important for reasons that will become more and more obvious and urgent. What does the Bible mean by the gospel?

GOD created this world and the human race for his glory, pleasure and our joy. But, **WE** rebelled. Every single one of us have rebelled against God. we have attempted to make up our own rules, follow our own way and do our own thing. And God, who is infinitely holy and perfectly righteous would have been totally just to condemn us for our rebellion. But, instead of condemning us, God sent his own **SON**, to this earth in order to do for us, what we could not do for ourselves. Jesus lived a perfect life in our place and then he died a horrible death as the payment for our sin. When you understand that, and you **TURN** from your sin and you trust in Christ alone as your savior, your righteousness, and your king, you are forgiven of your sin. You are forgiven of all of your sin. You are declared righteous by God, united forever in Christ, adopted forever into his family, sealed by the Spirit and guaranteed that you will live with God and his people, perfectly and eternally. That's the gospel as the Bible defines it. Only that gospel saves, therefore that gospel is worth defending, protecting, understanding and proclaiming. Only that gospel is the real gospel. And what makes the real gospel so controversial is the fact that it is exclusive. There is no other way to be righteous in the eyes of God than through faith alone in Christ alone. That's it!

Read Text: Galatians 1.1-10

Those of you who are school teachers can certainly relate to Paul and the Galatians. How many of you have had the experience where you just got everyone in the class working on a project, or taking a test, and there is this rare moment of calm. No one is being squirrely, heads are down, kids are focused and there is just the sound of the students doing their work. In that moment, you are lulled into a condition of temporary insanity. And you think that it is safe to step out into the hall for just a few seconds to take care of something. Then, in literally less than 30 seconds, your room goes from quiet, serene peace, to complete pandemonium. What just happened?

That is what Paul is saying to these churches in Galatia. Paul and Barnabas were sent by their church in Antioch of Syria to places where there was no gospel witness. They ended up in the Galatia region and they proclaimed the gospel and planted churches in Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, and Iconium. Within one year, think about that!, one year, those churches were already going off the rails. Are you kidding me? I just stepped out into the hall!

This morning we are taking a break from the book of Acts and starting a 6-week study through the book of Galatians because the book of Galatians was written about this time in the story line of Acts. This is the letter that Paul wrote to these churches within a year of him being there. I

want you to read your Bibles. I want you to read your Bibles with understanding and this book gives you a powerful incentive to do so. Let me show you why. Look at the last phrase of v.2.

“To the churches of Galatia”

This book was written to the members of the churches. As we will see, false teachers had become a problem. Guys were already teaching things that were contrary to the gospel and while Paul is angry with those false teachers and uses some very graphic language regarding them, this book was written to the members because Paul is holding them responsible for their church. They tolerated false teachers. They allowed the heresy to be taught. They did not confront it or deal with it and the very gospel was at stake. Why is this book in the canon of Scripture? Why did the Holy Spirit include this letter that Paul wrote to them, in the Bible? Because this is an issue that the church always has to face and I want you to be discerning and prepared.

1.1 – 2.21 is the first major section of Galatians. Galatians is organized by 6 chapters for a total of 149 verses. The first 45 verses (or almost 1/3) of the book are given to ringing the alarm and explaining why Legalism is such a serious problem. *When you try to add something to the gospel, you always end up with something less than the gospel.* Paul is grabbing them by the lapels and saying – this is a big deal!! This is a serious issue. The iceberg of heresy has just cut a gaping hole in the boat of the church and if we don't address it, the whole thing goes under. But, in the moment, it doesn't seem like that big of a deal because what was being taught seemed right. There was something attractive about it, but make no mistake, this is dangerous. This is why Paul is so urgent. The fact is, the gospel is always under attack. (repeat) This is no game. But the fact that what we are about is so important does not mean that we are always dour. There is a lot of joy here because of the comradery and mutual devotion. We are serious about the gospel because we recognize and are experiencing the benefits and promises of the gospel. We know that the gospel brings God glory and brings us joy. In fact, God is displayed through our joy. God is serious about our joy. Our joy is the fruit of recognizing that we are partners in the most serious matter of the world. We are followers of Christ. We are deployed. We are in a war zone. We are to live aware that the gospel is under attack.

Not only is the gospel always under attack but you (we) have to know the truth so you (we) can hold your ground. It is not enough for me to be clear on the gospel and therefore sensitive to and discerning of ideas and teaching that would distort it. You have to be discerning. That is what this book does. It helps us see, understand, dissect and respond to one of the primary ways in which the gospel is attacked. This book helps us see what is at stake so we can recognize the urgency of this. The gospel (and gospel believing people – believers – the church) faces 5 common enemies; Subjectivism, Condemnation, Legalism, Elitism and Cheap Grace.

1) Subjectivism

Subjectivism means that my view of God is based on (subject to) my changing feelings and emotions. My emotions can be an indicator of what I am believing at the moment, but they are not a true gauge of reality and must be seen accordingly. I have to preach to myself the truth and make decisions based upon the unchanging standard of God's Word and not my shifting feelings. Feelings are God-given and are to be enjoyed and used for their God-given purpose, but these

affections and emotions must be governed by God's truth. Emotions are part of what it means to be human. Enjoying and using our God-given emotions for their God-ordained purpose is part of what it means to live life as God intended for us to live.

We could paint broadly with our theological brushes and say that a number of churches with a more "charismatic" type of theology tend to fall into this category. One of the dangers of an emotionally driven theology is that the gospel can be viewed subjectively. In other words, it is only true if it moves me emotionally. Which can be extremely dangerous, because the flip side of that is, if I am moved emotionally, then it must be true. When this is the setting, people are easily manipulated. The cross for some is reduced to being the place where Christ took our sickness, so we don't have to be sick anymore. The cross was the place where Satan and all the bad things that happen to people were defeated, so we can claim prosperity, health, comfort and protection in the name of Jesus. The cross becomes a means to achieving what I feel I want out of life. If that is your view of the cross, then how are you tempted to view God when you get the flu, or your little girl gets an infection, or your AC unit breaks, or you have an unexpected car repair? God must not love me because I have this dreadful thing that has just happened – right? That is what I mean by subjectivism. I base my view of God on what I am feeling about God in the moment.

2) Condemnation

Another common enemy of the gospel is condemnation. Condemnation is result of being more focused on my failures than I am on God's grace. "Oh, I am such a failure! I am so horrible. I feel so guilty." There are certainly some who trivialize their sin and who have no fear of God and are playing with fire. (Cheap Grace) But, there are also some of you who live feeling condemned because you focus more on your sin than you do on God's grace. A right understanding of the gospel helps you see how serious sin is, but it does more than that. The gospel rightly understood helps you to see that Jesus is a bigger Savior than you are a sinner and that Jesus is not stingy with forgiveness. Subjectivism and Condemnation are two common enemies of the gospel. But, the book of Galatians deals with the third common and related enemy and that is Legalism.

3) Legalism

In a narrow and technical sense, legalism is the idea that I have to keep certain rules or maintain certain standards in order to earn, achieve or merit the grace and forgiveness of God. In a broad sense, legalism is the idea that God loves me conditionally based upon my performance for that day. It also bleeds into my relationship with other people as I, assume that posture with others or as I assume that they have that posture with me. In other words, I will conditionally relate only to people who meet the standards that I have created or I assume that people will only relate to me based on whether or not I am measuring up to their standards. Legalism and the fear of man are entangled together for our mutual destruction. I was meeting with a husband one night because his marriage was in trouble. No matter what his wife did, no matter what the kids did, it was never good enough. He was always finding a reason to criticize and it was crushing his wife. He was that way with me. He was a self-appointed fault-finder. Everyone had to measure up to his standard and he knew how to hold it against you when you didn't – but why? And that is what I probed that night. I said to him, "It must be really hard being you. What do you do when you don't measure up to your rules?" He erroneously believed that being validated by others meant

he was validated by God and that if he was validated by God he would be validated by others, therefore, he worked very hard to be validated by others and having a perfect wife, a perfect home, perfect kids was the ticket for him gaining the approval of others and therefore the validation of God. But wait! Isn't Jesus enough? When we live as if it is Jesus plus _____, then we are trying to add something to the gospel. Every time you try to add something to the gospel you end up with something less than the gospel and anything less than the gospel is not powerful enough to save you from sin and keep you from sin.

In these churches they were being led to believe that following Jesus, loving Jesus, trusting Jesus, being loved by Jesus, being a real Christian meant that if you were a male, you had to be circumcised. It was Jesus plus keeping the law. It was Jesus plus your obedience that saved you. It was Jesus plus this ritual that sealed the deal. You weren't really safe until you were circumcised. You weren't really approved by God until you were circumcised. What does that mean? It means that Jesus is not enough. It means that the life and death of Jesus was nice, it was compassionate, it was noble, it was tragic, it was sad, it was hard, it was painful, it was emotional, it was disappointing, it was terrible, but it was not sufficient. It was not good enough. Legalism means that Jesus did his part and now you have to do your part. Therefore, the better you do your part, the better you are, the more accomplished you are, the more righteous you are.

There is no performance that I can do that will cause God to love me more than He already does. But people tend to be performance driven, and we can learn that our "value" in the eyes of some is based on how we perform according to their standard. Approval is a powerful tool since everyone of us is vulnerable to the fear of man. You can use approval as a weapon to manipulate or to intimidate people. It is extremely effective, especially if you are in a place of influence or authority. The fatal flaw is that people in this system tend to see God has the ultimate rule-enforcer whose main purpose is to punish those who do not measure up. In order to keep everyone on the right road, church is the place where we scrutinize each other's performance and look for signs of failure and weaknesses and threaten to withhold approval or to pronounce censure on those who do not keep to the code. The problem with legalism is the code is man-made. Like the Pharisees, we add to the gospel our own code of what it means to be on the inside, to be in the "know."

Legalism always has to have an enemy out there somewhere. Legalism is never satisfied because it can never rest. Legalism by definition is finding value and security in your performance, so you can never rest in Christ, you always have to be doing things in order to prove your worth to God and others. There is always more that you can do. There is always someone else's approval you need to get. You may get every person to love you, but one and that one drives you crazy and you are driven to get them to like you. People who are caught up in legalism do not relax. They are driven, but it is not by the gospel, but by fear. They are afraid that you will not approve and they communicate this same disapproval towards others. Since they can never rest, they will not let anyone else rest either.

Many of us would swear up and down that we believe that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, but our view of sanctification says otherwise. Since Justification leads to Sanctification, what you believe has saved you, is also the truth that enables you to grow. If you develop a rules-driven means of growth, it will influence your own view of how you become

a believer. Over time and without addressing it, the code becomes more important than anything else and keeping the code becomes the battle within the church and between people. That is why people tend to measure their spiritual levels based on external codes, which is driven by pride and the fear of man. A close sister to legalism is the 4th enemy of the gospel: Elitism.

4) Elitism

Elitism is the idea that my standing before God is enhanced because of the group that I belong to. Jews were tempted to rely upon their Jewishness. Greek Orthodox are tempted to rely upon the long historical connections they can make to the early church fathers. Presbyterians can trace their identity to John Knox and John Calvin. Lutherans can say, “we have Luther.” Methodists go back to John Wesley. Baptists are proud of the fact that we dislike everybody (joking). But, the sad truth is, that groups are formed in many cases because they were attempts at recovering or protecting the gospel and over time the group became the focus instead of the gospel.

Subjectivism, Condemnation, Legalism, Elitism and Cheap Grace (don't have time to address) are enemies of the gospel and they have been enemies of the gospel since the founding of the church and will be enemies that we have to fight against until Christ returns. Romans takes aim at Condemnation, Elitism and Cheap Grace, while Galatians takes aim at Legalism.

Let's go through this opening section and here is what I want you to see. Paul did not come up with the gospel on his own. It was given to him by God. That is why the gospel is not subject to change. Also, if anyone had reason to believe that keeping the OT law (circumcision) would at least count for something – it would have been Paul. But Paul did not try to find a message that would be acceptable to his audience. He boldly declared what God had given him and the brothers at the church in Jerusalem agreed. In his trip back to Jerusalem he took Titus, an uncircumcised Greek and no church leader cared. But, even then false teachers were stirring things up and it started making a mess that even Peter and eventually Barnabas were influenced by it. (Read text). Are you tempted to think that there are certain things you need to do in order to get Jesus to love you more? Are you tempted to think that you can only be forgiven if you ever get good enough? Are you tempted to think that you are probably a little better than others because while you may have some problems – you don't do THAT!

Legalism tends to be at the heart of subjectivism because with legalism my focus is on me instead of Christ. Legalism tends to be at the heart of condemnation because my good is never good enough. Legalism is at the heart of elitism, because I am prone to think that you are not quite as good as me. The heart of legalism is pride. Pride is what drives the fear of man. The fear of man makes us approval junkies. We are so easily driven by that, and we figure it will work on others, so we manipulate our relationships with it. The gospel destroys pride. I have nothing to bring to the table. I cannot impress God. I have nothing to impress you with. My only hope is the cross. The cross absolutely takes all of the wind out of my lungs if I am trying to inflate my own balloon blow wind into my own sails. But on the other hand, the cross fills my lungs with the exhilarating oxygen of grace that enables me to sing with passion and live with hope and forgive and love and worship! When people are breathing in the air of legalism, they cannot exhale forgiveness. But when they inhale the gospel, then forgiveness is the flavor of their breath that carries their words. - Galatians 6