

To God Alone Be The Glory

You wouldn't want it to happen to you either. It must have felt a little like when you're at the beach, and you've built this beautiful sand castle, and, as you're standing back to admire your work, someone comes along and tries to kick it down. Only it was a lot more personal than a silly sand castle. It would be similar to you fathers putting all that time and energy and money into raising your children, only to have the pushers try to hook them on drugs. But what the apostle Paul was dealing with was a lot more consequential than just addiction and possible death by overdose. False teachers had come to the congregations in Galatia and were surreptitiously attacking the gospel. Paul wasn't able to go to Galatia in person to defend the gospel, so he wrote the Christians there the letter from which our text comes. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul encourages: **REMEMBER: IT'S GOD'S GOSPEL.**

Paul began this Letter to the Galatians calmly with his standard greeting: "*Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*" Then he got right to the point: "*I am astounded that you are so quickly deserting Jesus. Evidently some people are confusing you and trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. If anyone is proclaiming a different way to get right with God than through Jesus alone, let him be eternally condemned*" (Galatians 1:3,6-9).

Do you get the impression that Paul was serious? Can you tell he has gotten quite upset? Well, if someone attacks the good news about Jesus, they are attacking the means through which God wants to rescue sinners from the consequences of their sins. It's like making chocolate chip cookies, but instead of a half teaspoon of vanilla, you substitute a half teaspoon of anthrax. The means for delivering chocolate to your mouth becomes a means for delivering death. Changing God's recipe for salvation means a loss of salvation. Paul didn't want anyone to lose their place in heaven, so Paul confronted those false teachers head on.

The attack those teachers were making was just like most of the other attacks ever made on the gospel all the way down to today. That's what makes studying Galatians so valuable. It teaches us what to watch for, so we can spot such attacks on the gospel, even if they come from well-meaning preachers with a wide audience, or books you buy from Christian book publishers, or nice old ladies. Here's the key to recognizing an attack on the gospel: most attacks include 'the gospel plus something.' It usually sounds like this: "Oh, yes, Jesus died on the cross and paid for your sins, but you have to..." * The false teachers in Galatia were saying, "Jesus is the Savior, yes, but you have to be circumcised if you want to be saved." See how closely we need to listen to anyone who teaches the gospel?

The Galatian Christians replied to the false teachers with words like these: “But Paul taught us that we don’t have to do anything to get right with God. Salvation is just ours as a free gift.” And apparently the false teachers responded with things like, “Oh, who is that ol’ Paul anyway. He’s not even a real apostle. He’s a Johnny-come-lately. Why would you trust his message? When that Paul left Judaism for Christianity, Jesus had already ascended to heaven. So Paul probably made up his message out of his own head.”

In this part of Paul’s letter to the Galatians he is responding to the adding of “you have to” into the gospel, and he’s answering the false accusation that he’s not a real apostle and that he made up his message.

First he points out, “Hey, this is not my own message. In fact it’s not a human message at all. IT’S GOD’S GOSPEL. So don’t listen to anyone who tells you I got it from people.” This is how Paul put it. *¹¹I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. ¹²I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. IT’S GOD’S GOSPEL because it came from God.*

Just ask yourself, why would someone like Paul ever espouse the gospel? He had been the kind of person that no one could tell anything to. So the likelihood

of him being won over by the people he was persecuting was slim to none. Listen to Paul describe what he had been like before he knew Jesus as Savior: *¹³You have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.* In another place (Acts 26) Paul explains further: *“I...was convinced that I ought to do all that was possible to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth.”* So Paul hunted and arrested Christians, tried to force them to blaspheme against Jesus, and when it came time to put them to death, Paul cast his vote against them. So in his obsession against Jesus, Paul was even guilty of murder. There was no chance of any human talking Paul out of Judaism.

Think about mosquitoes for a moment. Did you ever catch a mosquito in the act? You look on the back of your hand, and there she is, drilling down into your skin. Do you feel indignant toward that blood sucker! What do you do? You **squish** it right before your very eyes. “Teach you to bite me!” I wonder if God feels indignant like this when we sin against him. But rather than squishing us, he spared us and squished Jesus instead. In place of God’s wrath, we get his huge, amazing love and tender mercy! That’s God’s gospel. Who would ever make up a story like that? ?God kills his own Son to save us lowly mosquitoes? Go study

all the world religions as well as the doctrines of most Christian denominations, and what do you find? They claim humans have to do something in order to please God, or else no happy outcome. That's the kind of religion that humans make up.

And yet the false teachers also claimed Paul listened to other people and took their ideas. No. Paul listened to Jesus. Paul's gospel was GOD'S GOSPEL.

¹⁵God, who set me apart from birth and called me by his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son in me. That's the only way a Pharisee like Paul would become a slave of Jesus. The gospel has **power** from God to convert people, people like you and me. And since the gospel was so powerful that it brought you and me to faith in Jesus, why would we want to weaken it by adding a human component? some sort of "but you have too...?"

REMEMBER, IT'S GOD'S GOSPEL. God saved you completely without any help!

Since the false teachers had attacked the message and the messenger, Paul showed that his apostleship in no way depended on man's doing. ¹⁶"When God revealed his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not consult any man, ¹⁷nor did I go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went immediately into Arabia and later returned to Damascus. Paul did not need to consult any man. Jesus himself had appeared to Paul. Paul was clear on what

Jesus wanted him to do. He was sure of the message. So Paul didn't even go talk to the leaders of the church. They had received the same message to proclaim from the same resurrected Jesus. What could anyone add?

So Paul went into Arabia—not Saudi Arabia, but eastward from Damascus, probably the place known to us as Stony Arabia. What did he do there? The Bible doesn't say, so we are left with guesses. Arabia was thinly populated, so it doesn't appear Paul went there to proclaim the good news. My favorite guess is that Paul went to Arabia to ponder all the implications of the gospel and to dig into the Scriptures. He had already studied the Old Testament thoroughly as a Pharisee, but he had never really understood it because he had not noticed Christ in the Old Testament. Everything changed when Paul met Jesus for the very first time on the road to Damascus. Jesus gave Paul himself, because Jesus is the key for unlocking the Old Testament. You know how it is when you've been wrestling with a part of the Bible and suddenly the Holy Spirit clarifies that passage for you? That must have been what it was like for Paul as everything now fell into place. Luke tells us that when Paul went back to Damascus later on, Paul "*grew more and more powerful and baffled the Jews living in Damascus by proving that Jesus is the Christ*" (Acts 9:22). So you see Paul's message was well established before he met even one of the other apostles.

Paul reports: ¹⁸*Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days.* ¹⁹*I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother.* Fifteen days isn’t enough time to complete a course of study. Besides, Peter was the only one of the Twelve apostles still in Jerusalem. Yes, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, Jesus’ own brother, met Paul, but he added nothing to Paul’s message either.

We don’t know why Paul stayed in Jerusalem only 15 days. It seems that Paul did some preaching in Jerusalem, but when he angered some of the residents and they tried to kill him, the believers whisked Paul away to safety. He reports: ²¹*Later I went to Syria and Cilicia.* ²²*I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.* ²³*They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.”* ²⁴*And they praised God because of me.* Even though Paul was not part of the established Judean church, he was preaching the very same Christian message they were hearing from the original apostles. This unity in doctrine and faith gave the Judean Christians great joy, and they praised God for it. **IT’S GOD’S GOSPEL and wow! is it powerful!**

Okay, so Paul’s gospel was GOD’S GOSPEL. He didn’t make it up or

receive it from another human. He got it from Jesus, and it changed him. What do we do with this in 2022? Well, since this message comes from God, it challenges us to believe it fully, never to let our doubts about it fester or to turn away from it or let anyone talk us out of it or let life squeeze it from our schedule. Let’s put our full trust in it and find a way to dig into it at least a little each day so we can grow in faith and be better fathers, mothers, friends, workers, members. Don’t let you’re your learning style get in the way. If you learn better by hearing than by reading, let’s get you set up to listen to the Bible a bit every day. If you learn more by doing and you’re retired, let’s connect you with Builders for Christ. But if you learn well by reading, oh my, you have a treasury of books available to you. Let’s get you set up with reading material that you can chew on a page or two per day. Since this gospel is from God, we want it to have a pervasive influence in our lives. We want it to be so much a part of our daily thinking that if anyone comes along and tries to mix in some “you have to”s, or insinuates that Jesus isn’t all that important for life in our day, you’re ready to reply: “The good news says, ‘Jesus did it all.’ I’m sticking with my Savior Jesus.”

Since God’s gospel is such a powerful message that it changed Paul and it changed you and me, and has us on God’s path to eternal peace, think what it can do for your friends and relatives and associates and neighbors. Let’s find

ways to share God's gospel so it helps still others.