

Series: Galatians	Reference: Galatians 1:1-10	Title: Sink or Run?	Date: 04.16.23
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The message of the gospel is of utmost importance. Paul's passion reveals the gospel is what he cares about most. As you listen today, think, if someone were to gauge what you care about most, based on the passion you have for it, what would that be?			

Color Changes in text indicate slide changes

In scene 50 of *Lord of the Rings - Tale of Two Towers*, Samwise Gangee is talking to Frodo at one of the lowest points of their journey after Frodo has just despairingly said, "I can't do this Sam."

Sam responds, *"I know. It's all wrong. By rights we shouldn't even be here. But we are. It's like in the great stories, Mr. Frodo. The ones that really mattered. Full of darkness & danger, they were. And sometimes you didn't want to know the end. Because how could the end be happy? How could the world go back to the way it was when so much bad had happened?"*

But in the end, it's only a passing thing, this shadow. Even darkness must pass. A new day will come. And when the sun shines it will shine out the clearer. Those were the stories that stayed with you. That meant something, even if you were too small to understand why. But I think, Mr. Frodo, I do understand. I know now. Folk in those stories had lots of chances of turning back, only they didn't. They kept going. Because they were holding on to something."

The peaceful days of living in the Shire behind them, they find themselves in battle after battle for the sake of life & light. Maybe you feel the same after the last few years? Christians have been pushed to the edge. Even within Christendom, many seem to be turning away from truth. Gone are the days of living in the peaceful Shire. Sam & Frodo considered themselves as part of a greater more important story, as are we.

Today we start a series on Galatians, where the gospel of God's grace will shine brightly through the darkness. We'll better understand Paul's heart & message of the gospel which is of utmost importance. Paul's passion reveals the gospel is what he cares about most. If someone were to gauge what you care about most, based on the passion you have for it, what would they say?

Paul was a church-planting missionary, establishing churches, then teaching them through correspondence. This was one. After Paul established a church, Judaizers, Pharisees who believed in Jesus (Acts 15:1, 5), would often follow adding to his teaching in a way which undermined the true gospel of grace. They added that you had to follow the law to be saved. Circumcision being one thing they demanded, since it was the sign of the covenant in the Old Testament.

Paul begins in Galatians 1:1-10 on p795 of your pew Bibles. Turn there & follow along...

Paul, an apostle - sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ & God the Father, who raised him from the dead - ²and all the brothers & sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia: ³Grace & peace to you from God our Father & the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God & Father, ⁵to whom be glory for ever & ever. Amen.

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ & are turning to a different gospel - ⁷which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion & are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! ⁹As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

¹⁰Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

In chapter 1, Paul addresses the components of the gospel, which is about Jesus & His sacrificial death on the cross for our sins (v4). Grace is at the heart of this good news. Without God's undeserved favor toward us in Christ, we'd not be in right standing with Him - the Judaizers undermined that by adding requirements to earn God's favor.

In difficult times, it's tempting to compromise truth & adopt false messages. In a desert hot & cold air, coupled with sunlight, form mirages. Our eyes think they see water ahead, but nothing's there. Sometimes when we're in a spiritual desert, we're tempted to believe things which are false - to shortcut the Gospel's purity. Paul's exhorting the Galatians to remember, no matter what happens, or what they hear, they must not waver from the truth of the gospel (1:8-9).

Jack Miller tells us, there are 6 reasons revealed in Galatians as to why Christians need to consistently reinforce Gospel truth in themselves. He says, (1) We can turn from it - 1:6. (2) We can be deceived & are capable of laying aside the Gospel - 2:11-14. (3) We can forsake the Spirit - 3:1-3. (4) We can lose our Joy - 4:15. (5) We can fall from Grace - 5:3-4. (6) And, we can grow proud - 6:14.

Gospel purity's important, so Paul sets the tone in chapter 1 strongly, because he's rightly passionate about the polluting of grace & salvation in his friends.

First, he says, there's only one gospel (v7). Paul feels so strongly he wants them to understand, even if an angel should miraculously appear & tell them another way to salvation, they shouldn't believe it (1:8-9). Bold, yet very logical. If we believe we're saved by grace through faith alone, then belief has bearing on salvation. Paul's afraid of a corruption of faith jeopardizing the message of God's grace.

If chapter 1 sets the tone, explaining the purpose of the letter, verse 10 is its rationale. Paul isn't trying to please them. Rather, he wants to show his love for them & God. His goal's to serve Christ by loving God & neighbor. But showing love isn't always the same as saying only what makes people happy, or feel good. A distinction often lost in religious circles today, so it's important to notice he stays Christ focused. Putting the gospel first helps us speak truth in love to others, even if it's hard truth.

Paul was a guy in a world of change & philosophical thought (v14). An apostle. Eyewitness. One who can't be doubted, having seen the resurrected Christ. Some didn't think he was an apostle, since he'd not been with Christ during His ministry, nor did he attend the resurrection. Paul however claimed apostleship since he'd been knocked off his horse on the Damascus road by Jesus & given a task. He's guided & directed by Jesus, not by men (1:11-12). A man worth listening to, not out for glory, personal gain, or to advance a personal philosophy. He had everything to lose by following Christ. A Hebrew of Hebrews who counted everything a loss except the surpassing greatness of knowing Jesus as Lord (Ph 3:4-8).

He was devoted to the drama unfolding in history & the will of the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Someone may ask, did Jesus really rise from the dead? Why not? Truth is stranger than fiction. We believe all kinds of things. Many believe in ghosts or aliens, without having seen either. Many believe we should never suffer an injustice, or we're entitled to a good life. That's a stretch. My son's baseball coach said to me after he'd played a particularly good game, "Don't wash his uniform, keep it in a plastic bag - make him wear it dirty next game! I don't want to jinx this!"

Christ appeared to the disciples & hundreds of people over a period of 40 days. Jesus ate fish & told Thomas to stick his finger in his wounds. Was that mass psychosis? Historical eyewitness accounts, in a particular place & time with real trustworthy people, is overwhelmingly in favor of the veracity of Christ's story. And, if you've been changed by the power of the resurrected Christ, you can attest to it yourself.

Paul's upset. His words are divinely inspired. But shouldn't God's word be all sweet things like, "Pet the bunnies, I created them, they're soft." No, this says people who pervert the Gospel should be eternally condemned (vv8-9). Later he wishes these folks would go the whole way & emasculate themselves when talking about circumcision in 5:12! Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is upset by the fact that we want to create a comfortable Gospel around ourselves based on following the rules, where we can practice liturgy & still live as we please, instead of true walking faith in Christ.

Paul's was a Hellenistic Jewish historical setting. This whole concept of the Gospel had thrown him off the horse of his own Jewish tradition for very good reason. It flew in the face of the culture of law & practice of it which he'd held so dear. But he's convinced of the simple Gospel of Grace for all peoples - a gospel which says grace is free & not earned by what we do. But many Jews felt the Gentiles weren't worthy. Judaizers thought if Gentiles were to receive the Gospel at all, they had to become Jewish first -

they had to do prescribed things to earn God's favor. This was the context Paul wrote into, his words packed with foundational instruction on salvation by faith alone.

Paul considered himself an apostle to the Gentiles of the Hellenistic world. Surrounded by Hellenistic thought & philosophy which was unconcerned with history. For them, ideas were ever changing. Once ideas passed in time they were considered out of date, since ideas always evolved - much like today. A Hellenistic person wouldn't set his thoughts on history, it was simply forgotten & unimportant. Like progressive America, unconcerned with ancient Christian myth, as they'd call it, they look only to the future.

Hellenistic people spoke in some ethereal realm, whereas Paul was rooting people back into biblical history. His pivotal point was the crucified Christ, prophesied & imaged in the Old Testament, who gave Himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age.

Looking at our world, is it as it should be? Mass shootings? Exceeding yearly murder rates in cities? Cancer, hatred, racism? Is this just the way it is? We're born, live, deteriorate & die. *We'd do well to think about history in stages, how they ought to be, what they are, what they can be, or what they will be.* If my car gets stolen I think, that shouldn't have happened (ought to be). It did (it is). I can get another car (what it can be). But, I long for a day when crime won't be a problem (what it will be); what ought to be, is, can & will be. All four of these categories coincide with Paul's view of biblical reality - *Creation, Fall, Redemption (in Christ) & Restoration.*

Paul roots himself in history speaking into the present evil age of thought & reason which only leads people away from God. Not all that thought & reason was bad, the stubborn Jewish tradition which denied salvation by grace through faith alone he fought against wasn't good. Paul's age wasn't much different than ours, we have ways of thinking contrary to the Lord - we need a shaking up. Thought ceases to be good when it questions without considering consequences. Reason's good until we reason beyond what is right & into absurdity, which is happening now.

We like to think logic & linear thought are highly valued now. But our worldview arises from many people. One influential person was the 19th century philosopher Hegel, who brought us the concept of speculation, or dialectics. Coming up with the idea of Thesis, Antithesis & Synthesis (explain). Which led to the idea that truth is always evolving - never coming to an absolute. Nietzsche took this further & claimed God's dead - we've killed him with rationalism & science. In his view, it was the end of any accepted faith based standards in society where we're constrained by considerations of morality, or any faith related sense of purpose. Sartre took this further as an existentialist claiming we're a blank slate, defining our own essence by what we choose to do. That we have no predetermined nature - free to act independently & create our nature & values, from personal choices - sound familiar? All this philosophic evolution has left people hopeless skeptics. It's all around us. Look at this excerpt from a Woody Allen piece as he observes a painting in a museum next to a woman...

WOODY ALLEN: *That's quite a lovely Jackson Pollock, isn't it?*

GIRL IN MUSEUM: Yes it is.

WOODY ALLEN: What does it say to you?

GIRL IN MUSEUM: It restates the negativeness of the universe, the hideous lonely emptiness of existence, nothingness, the predicament of man forced to live in a barren, godless eternity, like a tiny flame flickering in an immense void, with nothing but waste, horror, and degradation, forming a useless bleak straightjacket in a black absurd cosmos.

WOODY ALLEN: What are you doing Saturday night?

GIRL IN MUSEUM: Committing suicide.

WOODY ALLEN: What about Friday night?

Funny, but sad...

Think about this question, are you a blank slate? What is our moral compass? Is the Man/boy love society okay? Is surgical gender transition of children okay? Can one just claim to be a woman despite biology & undress in the locker room? These are moral issues, we know it innately. Paul roots his argument in the historic center point of Christ's resurrection for a reason. The book of Roman's tells us we're not a blank slate - we're born with a soul compass. With an image indelibly stamped on our being. General revelation, found in places like Psalm 19:1-4, tells us God is there, real & active. We look out onto the stars, trees & landscape, even at ourselves & say, there's something out there.

Roman's & Psalm 19 go further to tell of Special Revelation by God to humankind in Scripture as to who He is & what He expects of us. In Genesis it says, "*In the beginning God created...*" He created humanity in His image - not a blank slate, denying the Creation account, denies the whole story. If God is dead then there's no purpose & we do define our own reality from within each individual, but that's not Truth, we'd be in trouble if it were. There was an ad for Catholic school education which read, "*I deserve to be taught the Truth.*" Everyone needs Truth that we're created in the image of God, and that image was broken in the Fall. Sin entered the world through one man, Adam, breaking our relationship with God & bringing spiritual death to mankind. This is Paul's reality from which he speaks. And our reality, although many Christians are abandoning it. Life didn't emerge from nothing, nor is it spiraling out of control. Life & creation are on a path, part of a story. The Story, the only one worth the fight.

The Fall created a need for reparation & redemption. God's moving creation back to normalcy. In that process we have to be brought back into right relation to God. The book of Romans & Ephesians chapter 2 tell us this doesn't happen by our own effort/works. It happens by grace through faith in Christ alone. Redemption - that all who believe on Jesus & confess with their mouths He is Lord, will be saved - that simple, nothing added, nothing detracted. There's a plan over the world & all of creation greater than just your life, or what you see in the news. A greater plan than who you'll marry, where you'll go to school, what career you'll hold. The story of a creation which tells us

of what life 'ought to be', but 'is' not right now, becoming what it 'can be' & finally, 'what it will be', as we fight battle after battle for the sake of Christ in others.

But, people don't play by the rules, do they? Let's say you got a neighborhood baseball game together. You bat first, hit a line drive to the short stop, he throws you out at first. Then your neighbor gets up to bat on the other team, hits a line drive to third, the ball's thrown to first before your neighbor reaches the bag, but instead of coming back to the bench, he claims he's safe, since the first baseman didn't tag him. That's not playing by the rules, but he claims he has his own rules. That's not how it ought to be, but it's how it is today. We can no longer think people play by the rules. There's no standard any longer. When I was growing up, my mom could trust in a standard held by parents & teachers - there was innate trust - no longer the case. People don't play by the rules any longer. Now we're told, "Do whatever makes you feel good, run towards the mirage - it's real!" Never before have we stood on such shaky ground...but it's okay! God's restoring creation. Shaky ground doesn't mean it has to shake our soul when we have the solid ground of Christ on which to stand.

In the show *Mythbusters*, they mixed up a large batch of corn starch & water which makes Ooblek - a non-Newtonian fluid. Stationary objects sink in it, but upon striking Ooblek its viscosity increases making it a solid. They wanted to see if they could walk or ride a bike across it without sinking. They could if they went fast enough, but if they stood still they sank. As Christians we've sought the Christian American Dream, standing still in our faith. Slowly building our kingdom under the guise of Christ - go to church, get a job, save for retirement. But what happens...we sink into the philosophies of the world. Because it's not the Gospel, it's not solid ground. The Gospel, as Paul puts it, is the true Gospel, grace & power for living out the purposes of Christ as Paul did!

He saw the greater narrative of God restoring the created order. Knowing his place in the story, rooted & grounded in the greater narrative assured of his part. Seeing the world through the eyes of Christ. In Galatians he reminds us of this & pulls us back to Jesus. Outlining why Christians need the Gospel. Since, in the Biblical World View, it's no longer what can be in Christ, but what is! We're redeemed, and on the road to restoration needing to keep our minds focused on the true Gospel. The journey's difficult, hope lies before us, and it's worth fighting for it together...

SAM: I wonder if we'll ever be put into songs or tales. I wonder if people will ever say, "Let's hear about Frodo & the Ring." And they'll say "Yes, that's one of my favorite stories. Frodo was really courageous, wasn't he, dad." "Yes, my boy, the most famous of Hobbits. And that's saying a lot." **FRODO:** Well, you've left out one of the chief characters: "Samwise the Brave." I want to hear more about Sam. Frodo wouldn't have got far without Sam.

We won't go far without each other. Sink, or run? Darkness is only a passing thing, a shadow. Even it must pass. A new day will come. And when the Son shines He will shine out the clearer. There are plenty of chances to turn back - keep going in the light of the true gospel, don't chase the mirage. Run the race of faith well together!