
No Other Gospel

DAVE BAST

What is true Christianity? What is the authentic Gospel message? Claims and counterclaims abound; false teachings and half-truths have been around as long as the Gospel itself. The Bible doesn't treat this lightly. It gives us the tools to discern false teaching from its own right teaching; but where do we find them? Stay tuned.

BOB HEERSPINK

From ReFrame Media and Words of Hope, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast. We are beginning today, Bob, a series of programs on Paul's letter to the Galatians. It is really one of the foundational blocks of the New Testament; probably one of the earliest writings...

BOB HEERSPINK

Perhaps the earliest of all the epistles.

DAVE BAST

Yes; scholars are a little bit differing on that; but just a little background to the letter. Galatia was an area in what is today Turkey, and it covered quite a large area from sort of the center of the country around what is the capital today, Ankara, all the way down to the south coast, to those cities that are mentioned in Acts as part of Paul's first missionary journey; and so the Apostle... It was kind of his first big mission field experience of traveling there and reaching out to Gentiles with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

What he found, of course, is that that Gospel, as it goes out to the Gentiles got some pushback from other people in the Church. In fact, if you look at the first chapter of Galatians immediately you get into the question of where do you find the reliable Gospel? Who can you really trust? You know, we wrestle with that question today: Can you trust your leaders? Where do you go for the straight facts?

DAVE BAST

And so often leaders attract a following because of their style, because of their charisma, because of their personality. It is just part of human nature to be sort of drawn or attracted to a powerful sort of person or a great communicator; and the question is, do we judge the message by the person or the person by the message? That is one of the issues – the important issues – raised here in Paul's letter to the Galatians.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, Paul already in this first chapter is talking about the crisis that has really hit the Church...

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

With regard to whom are they going to trust?

DAVE BAST

Yes; so because Paul went there, but then he was followed by other people who said something quite different from his message.

BOB HEERSPINK

And as you read this first chapter of Galatians, what you discover is that unlike his other letters, where he is offering thanksgiving to God for the Church and celebrating the use of their gifts, and how much they mean to him, he immediately in this chapter launches into a message that he is absolutely shocked at what is happening in the early Church. Let me read some verses from that first chapter. He says:

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ, and are turning to a different Gospel; ⁷not that there is another one; but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the Gospel of Christ. ⁸But 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. ⁹As 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. Absolutely...

DAVE BAST

Powerful words.

BOB HEERSPINK

Powerful words.

DAVE BAST

You are clearly seeing here evidence of Paul's opponents. I think many of us get the idea, you know, he is the great Apostle Paul, and everyone must have revered him and lifted him up; you know, the author of much of the New Testament; but in his own time Paul was at the center of a storm of controversy much of the time; and it seems as though wherever he went, others followed in his footsteps who were very critical and who came after him with a sort of an attack that was trying to draw Paul's converts into a different sort of gospel – following a different message.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, there are obviously people who are coming into the church at Galatia, and what they are saying is: Paul is not really giving you the straight goods. He is not giving you the whole story. They are actually accusing Paul of preaching an abridged gospel. This is the gospel light, because what they are saying is: It is not enough merely to come to Christ; you really have to become a Jew first, and then become a Christian. You come to Christ by taking to yourself the whole Judaic law.

DAVE BAST

It is very interesting to me because something similar has happened all down through the history of the Church. There have always been groups who have come to young Christians or new Christians... it is happening today, in Africa, for example... and saying: you know, what you believe is fine. You've got the basics, but you know, there is another book... there is another teacher... there is a further revelation...

BOB HEERSPINK

There is deeper doctrine.

DAVE BAST

Yes; there is a further revelation that you also need to accept in order to really be saved, to have the full story; and something like that was happening with Paul; and listen to how he responds to them. First of all, he expresses his astonishment, but then he says three things about their message – what they are telling you. He says that it is distorted in verse 7: There are some who want to distort the Gospel of Christ. He says in

verse 8 that it is contrary to the Gospel that they have heard; and finally, also in verse 7, they are troubling you. So this is going to cause real trouble if you follow this distorted, contrary message; not that there is another Gospel; there is really only one, Paul says, but they are coming with this really false message that contradicts what I have told you.

BOB HEERSPINK

And the interesting thing is, these false teachers are not denying the resurrection; they are not denying the incarnation; but they are adding to the Gospel in a way that Paul says is totally perverting the message of Christ, and we really have to investigate that more, Dave, when we come back; to think about how Paul responded to this crisis when it came to the fidelity of the faith.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

This is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

BOB HEERSPINK

And I am Bob Heerspink.

DAVE BAST

So we have been looking at Paul's response to his opponents – the people who followed him and preached a contrary message to the one he had given. He expresses astonishment that the Galatians could be falling for this stuff. It is a different gospel – it is a perversion of the true Gospel that he had proclaimed, and he says of these people: Let them be accursed!

BOB HEERSPINK

Strong stuff.

DAVE BAST

Strong word: *anathema*, literally, in the original. I mean, rejected by God is what he is saying, and you know, you might ask: hey Paul, where is some charity here – where is some kindness? Isn't that a little bit strong?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, Paul is tolerant when it comes to some things. You know, when it comes to relating to people he even says: I will become all things to all people to win some to Christ; but when it comes to the core of the Gospel message, that is different.

DAVE BAST

Tolerant toward people, intolerant of error...

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

I also think it is interesting that he includes himself in this. He says not only let them be accursed, but if I or if anyone, even an angel from heaven, comes with a different gospel message, let them be accursed. In other words, he calls it down on himself if he should somehow fall into this error.

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; Paul recognizes that the central thing is not the messenger, but the message; and I think today in our world we are often impressed by the messenger.

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

You know, does this person speak well? Is there a charismatic quality to that person – to the person who is bringing the Gospel? These are the things that really can wow us; but Paul himself says: I am not a very impressive person when you hear me. I am not a great speaker. It is not about me, and it is not about preachers today in terms of their personal appearance; it is about the message they bring.

DAVE BAST

Yes; we were talking about this in a staff meeting, and one of our staff said: Yes, last Sunday I was in church and the sermon was really off base in its content, but some of the people loved it because the preacher walked around and was very engaging and personable; and that really does raise the question...

BOB HEERSPINK

Style over substance.

DAVE BAST

Exactly; so, you ask what then was the substance of the authentic Gospel, the one that Paul preached? I think there are two wonderful phrases that he uses in these verses that we read earlier that really get at the heart of it. In verse 6 – Galatians 1:6 he says: you are deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel; and in the next verse, verse 7: These people want to distort the Gospel of Christ. There is the key to what Paul shared with them. It was centered on Christ; it was all about Christ – and Christ alone.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; I think of those Reformation truths that say: Christ alone; grace alone.

DAVE BAST

Exactly.

BOB HEERSPINK

That is what Paul is saying right here.

DAVE BAST

It is all about Christ and all about grace; not about us. Salvation is something God does. He does it for us. It is a finished, accomplished act, and it is offered to us out of sheer grace – just unmerited favor. The only thing we do is acknowledge our need and receive it by faith.

BOB HEERSPINK

And the Judaizers were coming along and saying: Oh, but we can add to that. It was really a Christ-plus approach to the Gospel; and I think we have to look at this passage to say: Okay, how does Paul push back? I mean, he says: This is the Gospel I preach; but how does he defend this Gospel against the pressure that he is feeling from the Judaizers?

DAVE BAST

And the answer to that is he argues basically from the fact that this was revealed to him by God. If I go on and read the next few verses from Galatians 1, he says in verse 11:

For I would have you know that the Gospel that was preached by me is not a human Gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, ¹²nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right there he is appealing back to his conversion experience on the Damascus Road.

DAVE BAST

And then he goes on to kind of give a personal history; and these next verses have engaged scholars ever since for 2,000 years trying to piece together what Paul's life was like...

BOB HEERSPINK

The whole chronology issue.

DAVE BAST

It is not easy; especially if you try to match it up with what we learn in the book of Acts; but what does come through is that Paul didn't really consult with any of the other apostles. He had only brief contact with them. He spent about three years, he says, in Arabia, which was probably not what we think of, like Saudi Arabia, but the area of Syria; maybe in the environs of Damascus; and we can only presume that he spent those three years in close and careful study of the Old Testament, in prayer, and in just thinking through the implications of what God had told him when he met the Lord Jesus on the Damascus Road.

BOB HEERSPINK

The Judaizers were saying: Look, Paul, you got your message from the apostles and you got it wrong. You know, you were just a bad student. You didn't get the point.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you weren't one of the original twelve, anyway.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

You can just hear them come after...Paul? Paul is the guy who planted the church here? Don't you know he didn't even really know Jesus?

BOB HEERSPINK

Yes; you know, he wasn't too bad in what he taught you, but you didn't get the big picture; and Paul is saying: my revelation – my Gospel – is right from Jesus Christ. It is interesting, he even says later on that he was called to be this apostle from his birth; you know, from *before* his birth he was called; and he is called to preach to the Gentiles. It is language that harkens back to Jeremiah Chapter 1, where Jeremiah says: I was called before I was born; I was called to be a prophet to the nations. Paul is really saying: I stand in the prophetic tradition of a Jeremiah.

DAVE BAST

So, his message is not an invention – he didn't make it up. It is not a derivation – he didn't get it from some other person – some other human being. It was a revelation from the living Christ, and to desert that message is really to desert Christ himself. Paul is just the channel. It is the word of God. I think of that verse in 1 Thessalonians, where he says: you know, when you received the Gospel from me, you received it not as the word of man, but as it is in truth, the word of God.

BOB HEERSPINK

And he says...also as he defends his Gospel...he says: This Gospel is really in line with what the apostles are teaching and preaching; and I really appreciate that emphasis because I can hear someone say: Well, here comes someone on the scene and they have new revelations from God, you know. How do we know that this person isn't the next prophet of God to the world?

DAVE BAST

Yes; I was just going to ask you that. I mean, I have had the experience of somebody coming up to me and saying: God told me this; you know, God gave me this message; and my reaction is always to kind of cringe inside...

BOB HEERSPINK

I know; especially when they come and say: God told me to tell *you* this is what I want you to do.

DAVE BAST

Yes, how do you respond to that? So, is this what Paul is doing? Do we just sit back and say: Oh, okay; or do we kind of push back and say: you know, okay, validate your claim.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, Paul is saying: The revelation came from Christ to me, but the apostles all agree with this message. I mean, that is why he talks in Galatians 2 about the way in which he was affirmed by the other apostles with regard to the message that he and Peter are essentially on the same page with regard to the Gospel they preach.

DAVE BAST

I love this, too; elsewhere he stresses the fact that his message not only is in agreement with what the other apostles said, but it is also in agreement with the Old Testament – with the scriptures. You think, for example, of the opening of Paul's letter to the Romans, which starts this way:

¹Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God (that echoes what he says in Galatians...)

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

²The Gospel concerning his Son, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. So, it is consistent. There is one apostolic message. They are all in agreement, Paul included; and it is consistent with the whole Bible – Genesis to Revelation. It is one message.

BOB HEERSPINK

And that is what I would say to someone who comes along and says: Well, aren't there revelations today? And I have a *new* revelation from God. Take a look at what you are saying; does it really accord with the apostolic message? Does it square with the Old Testament and New Testament? That is our touchstone for today.

DAVE BAST

We will come back in just a moment to that issue: How do we apply all this; and especially, use it as a touchstone when we are evaluating the messages we hear; but first we want to talk about how listeners can join us in this conversation on our website. It is listeners like you that make *Groundwork* what it is. Our website, groundworkonline.com, is another way that we work to join you as you dig deeper into the scriptures.

BOB HEERSPINK

There, we continue to reflect on today's discussion about our world and the Bible, as well as many other conversations that listeners have begun about scripture and how it interacts with their lives. Plus, we look to you to help us think about upcoming programs. Finding us is easy. Just visit our website: groundworkonline.com.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Bob, I really think this passage we have been looking at in Galatians 1 is just about as countercultural today as anything we could find in the New Testament. It is condemnatory of other people's ideas and teaching; it is very hard-line; it is all about doctrine and the content of a message; and today most people don't really care that much about it. They are much more inclined to say: you know, whatever you believe is okay within broad limits; as long as you live right. How would you respond to that? Why is doctrine such a big deal to Paul?

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, I think it really helps me to think about what the Judaizers were saying. They weren't simply saying: Believe in Jesus Christ – Christ alone – grace alone. They were really saying: Christ-plus. We need to add in a certain social identity. You need to become part of an ethnic group. And I think we have to recognize that Christ...

DAVE BAST

Christ plus religious practice, in other words.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right; and I think...

DAVE BAST

Paul is *not* denying the validity of the moral law.

BOB HEERSPINK

Exactly; and I think we have to say there is a core of doctrine that stands at the heart of Christianity that we cannot betray. That is what Paul is saying. Christ alone – grace alone; but he is saying: Don't add now to that and say: Oh, there is something else that needs to be added into your identity to make you a true Christian.

DAVE BAST

Well, it is even stated explicitly in Acts 15. We are going to look at this a little bit in more detail in the next program, as we really dig into this controversy between Paul and the Judaizers; but in Acts 15, the whole Church gathered in Jerusalem for a council to try to hammer out this issue, and on the one side were those who were saying: Unless you are circumcised you can't be saved; so it was a religious ritual that was being added. They had to become Jews in order to be saved. It wasn't enough just to trust in Christ.

BOB HEERSPINK

Right.

DAVE BAST

And to me, that is worth fighting for – that basic, core Gospel message; is it enough for me to just trust in Christ – to just receive his grace; or do I have to add something to that?

BOB HEERSPINK

And I think as Christians we are tempted in subtle ways to compromise that core Gospel. You know, we are tempted to say: you know, yes it is Jesus Christ and yes it is grace, but you also have to be a member of *my* denomination...

DAVE BAST

Right.

BOB HEERSPINK

You have to be part of *my* small group; and then you *really* are going to experience salvation – then you are really part of the spiritual core.

DAVE BAST

Well, or there are groups that are quite explicit; that there is nobody outside of our little party that is saved, and unless you take baptism with us or in our special way; unless you follow our rituals; unless you adopt our mode of dress and behavior, then you are on the outside. Christ alone is not enough – grace alone is not enough. So, one reason I think this is so important is because salvation is at stake – the whole question of how do we come to know God and how do we come to experience his grace and his forgiveness; and anyone who says: Christ-plus is on the opposite side of the apostles.

BOB HEERSPINK

Well, if you have said Christ-plus, you are really throwing grace out the door because you cannot add to grace. As soon as you start adding to grace – as soon as it becomes something I have done – as soon as it becomes my social identity – then grace is no longer grace.

DAVE BAST

But that is really hard – it is really hard to live by grace; and that is why these controversies keep arising, because people keep wanting to say: Well yes, but... yes, but you really shouldn't do that; or you really should do that; or even something... we have seen this in our own time – in our lifetime: Keep the races separate. Don't mix them, even in the Church; don't mix them in society; and that is really a denial of the Gospel.

BOB HEERSPINK

It really is, and that really gets into the next program, because this becomes a crucial issue with regard to the implications of how we live together as God's people.

I think the takeaway for me as I think about what this means for myself is to say I have to keep grace central. It is at the focal point of my life; and I am always tempted to add in something else; I am always tempted to say: Yes, it's grace, but also it is the church I belong to or the school I attended or the books I have read. There is something else that makes me acceptable and more worthy than other people in terms of my relationship with God. I have to say I stand before God and it is grace and grace alone. Nothing in my hands I bring. It is only to the cross that I cling.

DAVE BAST

And I also have to be willing to say that for other people and to other people, because I have a natural tendency to want everybody to be like me, you know: Why don't you come to my church? Why don't you practice this or understand this issue the way I do, or interpret the Bible that way, as I have done. I have to be willing to extend that same grace to others and say: Christ alone is enough for you, too, to be accepted – to stand before God accepted and reconciled. And I also, I think, want to take away for myself this idea that it is the message that is key, not the messenger – not the quality or the style or the persona who brings it.

BOB HEERSPINK

Listen carefully to the message; and does that message accord with historic orthodox teaching? You know, when we recognize the fact that there are differences among the denominations, we are not throwing things wide open so that you can believe anything you want. The Church has taken its stance on the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed. There is an agreed-upon apostolic tradition; and we need to test what we hear against that message.

DAVE BAST

So, you better know the Bible yourself, and you better know grace in order to evaluate what you are hearing. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation today; and don't forget it is listeners like you asking questions and participating that keep our topics relevant to your life. So tell us what you think about what

you are hearing and suggest some topics or passages you would like to hear on future *Groundwork* programs. Just visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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