

## Contending for the Gospel

Galatians 1:6-10

In this passage, Paul is addressing the problem in Galatia: false teachers and their false gospel. **And the bigger problem: the Galatians were listening to these false teachers!** Another Bible book that deals with the subject of false teaching and false gospels is the book of **Jude**. There, Jude urges believers to “**contend for the faith.**” The word “contend” was an athletic term, meaning to “agonize greatly” or “struggle for.” **Contending for the gospel is agonizing.**

**We’ll all meet challenges as we contend for the gospel.**

**For Paul**, those challengers were known as the Judaizers.

**This is very relevant for a variety of reasons:**

Many high school graduates go off to college and consider abandoning the faith. The statistics are unbelievable, actually. What happens? There are a many contributing factors, including fact that they simply aren’t prepared to contend for the faith. They aren’t able to detect false gospels, and recognize the true Gospel.

- They take a **professor** who tries to pull out the bricks of their Christian faith, and they’re dazed & confused.
- They meet **friends** who raise questions about the Christian essentials, and are unable to respond.
- They meet a **guy**. They meet a new boyfriend who does not believe. Since, the romance is so great, she decides that it doesn’t really matter that he **worships unicorns, as long as he is sincere, and 'loves' her.**

These students make me think of the **Rocky movies**. Do you remember how the little Italian is steamrolling the competition as the champion, against hand-picked opponents, but then he meets a real challenger, **Clubber Lang** (“Mr. T”). Rocky had been on a roll, conquering everyone, including “**Thunderlips.**” But Clubber Lang was the real test. Then Apollo Creed decides to train him so that he can defeat Clubber.

Paul here is training the Galatians to contend with their Clubber Lang. He is trying to get them to be able to detect false gospels and recognize the true one.

Good pastors, good teachers, good parents will train students to contend for the faith. We aren't trying to knock them out; we're trying to knock down their arguments/strongholds and ultimately **win a person**, not just an argument (2 Tim 2:25).

This letter should give all believers sanctified "eye of the tiger inspiration" to contend.

- Maybe your challenger is **a friend**, whom you love, but he (or she) does not understand *why you insist that Jesus is the only way to God*. **He or she thinks you are a narrow minded Bible-thumper.**
- Maybe your challenger is **your kid**, who is turning away from God and the church, claiming "it's all a myth."
- Maybe you have **co-workers** who are reading Dennett, and Hitchens and others and have bought in to the new atheist movement. And not only do they not believe, but they don't even have a respect for belief.
- Or a **person you meet at the coffee shop** (UFO's - Matt)
- Maybe it's a **Religious person** (like this book) who is a legalistic Pharisee who doesn't understand grace.

### **Case Study on Contending**

- The Galatians' Departure
- The False Teacher's Distortion
- The Universal Warning
- The Apostle's Ambition

### **#1: The Galatians' Departure (1:6-7a)**

#### **No Thanksgiving**

Because Paul is so burdened by the Galatians' error, he offers no thanksgiving. He's like a parent that sees their kid running into the road saying: **"Hey, there's a car coming! Come back!"**

He wouldn't have received an "A" in Quintillion's literature class. Quintillion (35-95) was the expert in classical style and rhetoric. He said "I don't know why anyone would open up in such a wild exclamatory nature ... [he should have a] courteous and natural opening."

Paul does indeed open up in a wild, exclamatory nature because of the serious nature of the problem, "I am astonished!" He wasn't astonished that there were false teachers; it was that they were listening to them! Notice the nature of their "turning" and what we learn about the gospel itself.

## A. The Nature of Their Turning from the Gospel

### i. *It Was Serious!*

The word "turning" shows that it was a serious situation. The Galatians were in the process of switching teams.

- It means to "transfer one's allegiance."
- It was used of soldiers in the army who would go fight for the other side; or of politicians who would transfer to the other political party.
- It is a Cowboys fan wearing a Red Skins shirt!
- I have a picture of Babe Ruth in my office that has him in a Red Sox uniform. They traded him to the Yankees! What an awful transfer! Let them be accursed.
- In my world it was Rick Pitino going to coach Louisville.

The Galatians had come to Christ and put on the robes of righteousness and were now trying to turn back to the trash can to get their old clothes.

*Any works based system of religion is the other team! "All of this is from God" (2 Cor. 5:18) – meaning that is all of grace.*

These are Paul's kids.

- "My little children, I labor with birth pains until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19)
- "I have no greater joy than to hear my children are walking in the truth" (3 John 4).

(Like the parent that came to my office whose daughter was dating a Mormon. She was heartbroken, as her daughter was unable to distinguish the great difference in the two).

ii. *It Was So Soon!*

He is “**astonished**” that they were turning “**so quickly!**” The words “so quickly” echo the golden calf incident in **Exodus 32:7-8**.

- Israel had just been liberated from Egypt, received God’s law, and entered a covenant with God. When Moses went up on the mountain, they made a golden calf – and turned from the Redeemer.

Imagine what it would be like. You start these churches, in a few short years, they have departed! **What if you went off to a foreign land for three years (we are praying for some of you to do this), and you get back to find that they are adding the national religion in with the gospel? What would your response be? Astonished. Shocked. Dismayed. Angered. Yes. “Astonished” is a strong word in Greek.**

- **5:1** – “It is for freedom that God has set us free; don’t submit again to the yoke of slavery”

iii. *It Was Not Hopeless.*

The word “**turning**” indicates that it was not a *hopeless* situation. The situation was desperate but not beyond hope.

• “turning” is a *continuous present tense* verb which means that they were in the process. Even though one might make too much of this, Schreiner is right in saying “what indicates a process is the context as a whole” (fn 4, 84).

• Like the mother, I mentioned, earlier. She kept on and that girl came to a knowledge of the truth.

Later in the book he tells them not to “give up.” Don’t give up on the Gospel. “You were running well! What hindered you?”

## B. **What We Learn About the Gospel**

Notice three important truths about “turning from the gospel”

### 1. **When you turn from the gospel, you turn from God himself** (6) “Deserting him”

The first thing he says is that they are turning from God. They are NOT *just turning from a set of beliefs*; but rather, when you turn from the Gospel’s message, you are turning from God himself. (v. 3-5)

Paul says I’m astonished that you are turning from your Redeemer, the fountain of all grace.

- Many want to hold on to God but abandoned the Gospel.  
    **“I know God but of course I don’t accept the Gospel.”**

- The Pharisees claimed to know God and Jesus said you refuse to believe that the Scriptures are about me ... “You refuse to come to me.” (John 5:40) The message gets us to Jesus.

This is no small error to disbelieve the gospel. **This is like Bill Buckner: between the legs. Miss this and you miss God.**

Christ comes to us through the gospel!

When you turn from the gospel, you turn from the Savior. You are saying, “You are not enough, Jesus.” **Notice 2:21.** “You are insufficient, Jesus.” I need to gain righteousness by works. No!

### 2. **When you turn from the gospel, you turn from “the grace of Christ.”**

“The grace of Christ” is a synonym for the Gospel (cf., 5:4)

- Remember the Judaizers believed it was Jesus+ circumcision and the requirements of the OT law.

- It's Jesus Christ. It's his grace. Anything else is the other team. The other team is "human achievement" instead of "divine accomplishment."

Notice how the words "calling" and "grace" are together both here and **in 1:15**.

- The Galatians were called into the realm of grace ("in the grace of Christ"), and they were called by grace.
- This call is a powerful word that denotes God's sovereign action, and believers' experience.
- *When God calls you to Christ, you **sense a power***. You sense God dealing with you. Just as he called Abraham, Moses, Paul, he calls us – not for good in us but by grace.

So when you turn from the gospel, you are turning to a performance treadmill. It is a system that gets you nowhere and only leaves you exhausted.

Oh, to be sure works matter – but as the result of true faith, not the basis of faith. "For good works" (justice walk).

**3. You have nothing to turn to if you turn from the Gospel (6b-7a)** "a different gospel – not that there is another one"

Paul clarifies the nature of the intruders' teaching by saying "it's no gospel at all." There is only one gospel.

Paul seems to choose his words carefully to make his point.

- **6b: "different" (heteros)** "another of a different nature." Heterosexual is a modern example. A biblical example is in Hebrews 7:11, where it is used when talking about a different kind of priest is needed other than on the order of Aaron - namely Christ. Galatians were turning to a heteros Gospel.
- **7a: "another" (allos)** means "another of the same nature." A modern example is, "would you like another cup of coffee." A biblical example is in John 16 of the Holy Spirit,

when Jesus leaves, another of the same kind “allos” will come (14:16).

Paul says there is no other gospel. In all likelihood the false teachers were saying that their gospel was really not different than Paul’s. Yes it was. There is nothing else like it.

- This happens in cults. “Oh, we believe in Jesus.”

The point is that there is no other way to be right with God, to experience forgiveness of sins apart from this gospel.

- This is relevant because we swim in a sea of *religious pluralism* and *philosophical relativism*. “All religions are equally valid; and there is no one truth.”
- Jesus is not like **deodorant**. You may choose a number of types to keep you fresh. They will work. But Christ is not like that. *He has no equal*. He is not one among many. He is the one and only.
- A pastor friend surveyed his church, in a church context, and 78% believed someone who did not believe in Jesus could go to heaven.
- Almost everything is tolerated except for this exclusive claim. You can say, **I got up this morning and prayed to the Easter Bunny, was driven to work by the tooth fairy, and that’s okay. One way to Jesus? “Come on.”**

**We all came into the earth by one way, why do people think it’s so bad to believe we can get into the new earth by one way?**  
We learn more about why there is only one gospel in the next few verses, as we look at what the false teachers were saying...

## **#2: The False Teachers’ Distortion (1:7b)**

Notice two things that are true of false teachers everywhere...

### **A. False Teachers Create Confusion and Division**

The word “trouble” means to “shake” or “agitate” or “throw into confusion”

Their minds were like clothes dryers and the laundry mat. You know the one's with the glass? I washed my own clothes once when I was single! Okay more than once. It cost a fortune and I stopped going. I had two piles, "dirty, and dirty but I can wear again." But you would sit there and watch the clothes tumble. Shake, rattle, and roll.

- The Galatians were shaken, tumbling, thrown into confusion. (Go to **Acts 15:1, 24, 11** and see this).

To distort the Gospel is to destroy the church because the church is created and lives by the Gospel. The greatest troublemakers in the church are those who wish to distort the Gospel

I believe Satan operates more in the world of false Gospels than any other area. He twists, confuses, changes the Gospel; and puts people in mental strongholds, blinding their eyes to the truth. *Our flesh works in the areas of food, drink, sex, entertainment – that's one's easy.* Satan wants you to believe lies. Behind the false teachers is the real false teacher (**2 Timothy 2:25-26**) – who lives to create confusion and trap people in lies.

- He does it subtly with teachers like this. False teachers don't walk around and say, "Hug me, I'm a false apostle." They creep in like wolves.
- False teachers today aren't just weirdos on religious television. They may be **pop icons**, anyone who is promoting something that is not the gospel. A "stronghold" is an argument (Moreland).

## **B. False Teachers Reverse the Gospel (7b)**

"pervert" or "alter" or "distort" (ESV) the Gospel.

"It is a word denoting a radical change, like changing water into blood, fresh water into salt water, feasting into mourning, daylight into darkness" (Dunn in Schreiner, 86)



In fact, some have suggested that the better way to render this word is “**reverse.**” Jerome said, “it means to “set behind what is in front, and putting what is in front, behind.”

- That is certainly appropriate because that’s exactly what the false teachers were doing. They were distorting the gospel by reversing the gospel!

What do you mean reversing the Gospel?

- I mean this. There is a particular order to the Gospel.
- It goes like this: **Eph 2:8-10** (cf. Titus 2:5)
- “I’m going to do enough good things to be right with God and merit his grace and be saved” – no, you’ve reversed it. You’ve put what was in front, in the back. No. No. No. There’s an order to the Gospel. The Truth is that we’re we are saved by **grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ, apart from human works.**

*How are people distorting the Gospel today?*

- The answer is very simple. Anywhere people teach that you merit eternal life by your **goodness, your works.**

**Street Gospels.** How do you get to heaven?

- “Be a good person.” No one is!
- “I attend church”
- I grew up in a church
- My family is Christian
- I keep the golden rule

**Works-Based Religions** man-centered religion

- Mormonism: law of eternal progression
- Judaism: keeping of the law
- Islam: five pillars
- Buddhism: eight fold path
- JW: works
- Religious Legalism: If you clean up, fly right, pay taxes, do good in school, you’ll go to heaven...  
“Moralistic therapeutic deism.”

“But my friend is a Buddhist, and he’s a nice guy, he’s a moral guy, his family is polite. I’m not denying that. I’m not denying that people in other religions are moral people.

Here’s what I’m denying: that morality can get you to heaven. Morality can keep you out of jail, but not hell. If morality could save you, then Jesus wouldn’t have to die. You need something far greater than morality: perfect righteousness. Only perfectly righteous people can go to heaven, not just moral people; and no one in history has been perfectly righteous except Jesus. We need his righteousness.

We should not complain that there is only one way; we should marvel at the fact that there even is a way... Our flesh wants more than one way. If God gave more options, we would want 2,000. Marvel at the fact that despite our sin and rebellion God sent the God-man to save us. Only through him, the way, the truth, and the life, can we experience saving grace.

“But they are sincere” – I’m not arguing that either. There is such a thing as “zeal not according to knowledge.” They’re running fast, but in the wrong direction.

There is only one alternative to works based righteousness, and that’s grace; that’s the Gospel.

This works-based system is...

- A **hopeless** system because we aren’t just to be moral, we are to be perfectly righteous – and we can’t;
- A **heretical** system in that it’s not true – the goal isn’t about morality – it’s about Jesus;
- A **despairing** system in that you never know when you’ve done enough good works;
- A **Christ-less** system – whereby you are saying Jesus’ work on the cross **isn’t enough**.
- A **man-centered** system that **glorifies human beings**, not God himself for his grace.

What’s the alternative? It’s Christ’s righteousness given to us by grace alone through faith alone.

### 3. A Universal Warning (1:8-9)

Paul expresses his anger toward false teachers (8-9). He pronounces a **curse** on anyone who proclaims a counterfeit gospel.

He says it **twice** for emphasis and so that you know he didn't just lose his mind in verse 8!

- There are eternal consequences for sin.
- It's not in step with the modern world, nor was it in his world, but Paul shows us some important truths here:

*What are we to make of this 'curse?' Two lessons:*

**A. The warning is universal – The curse shows us the sobering responsibility we have as Christian teachers.**

Notice how Paul says, “**if anyone**” (verse 9); Notice how Paul **includes himself (8)**. “If we, or an angel preaches another Gospel...” If I start reversing this order, let me be accursed.

**There are many false teachers**, “Satan masquerades as an angel of light, leading many away pure devotion to Christ, by manipulation.” (2 Cor. 11:13-15). **Let him not just be deemed “a heretic,” but let him be “eternally condemned.”**

Someone might say, “**but that religion feels good.**” No one is denying you might feel something in another religion; but Satan is a deceiver my friend; he can make anything feel good. Remember, **Simon the Magician** in the NT, he had some calling him “The Power of God” but his message and his motive were fraudulent.

**B. The Gospel is essential – This curse shows us that the gospel is our priority as a Christian teachers.**

“Is he preaching the Gospel?” – that's the question. Elsewhere, **Philippians 1:12-18**, Paul speaks of guys who are preaching with bad motives; they were envious and jealous, **but at least they were preaching Christ**. What did he say about these teachers? “I

rejoice.” His concern was for the message more than the motives of the messenger. Because it is the Gospel that saves.

- **Because Christ’s glory is at stake**

False gospels always glorify man, because it boasts in human achievements. The real Gospel boasts only in the Lord! Notice **Galatians 6:14**.

Spurgeon said, “If you meet with a system of theology which magnifies man, flee from it as far as you can.”

If we could be good enough and do enough, and keep enough rules to merit eternal life, then we shouldn’t sing songs to Jesus? We should just sing about ourselves.

- **Because People’s souls are at stake**

We must get the Gospel correct because souls are at stake. Paul knew this was no marginal issue; it was a momentous issue. In **Romans 9:3**, he says, “I wish I myself were “accursed and cut off from Christ” for the sake of my brothers. He said that he would rather be anathema than to see his brothers condemned. That’s how seriously he took this matter.

Jesus said it would be better for a person to have a **millstone** put around their neck and be cast in the sea, then to cause someone else to stumble and not believe in the truth of the Gospel.

- **Because the health of the church is at stake**

**4:19:** Paul knew that this church was just an **infant church**. In 4:19, he tells them that he is in pain, laboring with them... **he knows if they miss the Gospel, they miss everything.**

Here’s what this means my friends, **we can have disagreements over some things**, but we have to **unite on the essentials of the Gospel**. St. Augustine said:

"In essentials, unity;  
in doubtful matters, liberty;

in all things, charity."

We believe the gospel is an essential issue because Paul said it was, "First importance" (1 Cor. 15).

There are **open handed issues** and **closed handed issues**; the Gospel is the only close handed issue for me. I will die for the Gospel, not for a style of music, spiritual gifts, details of the end times, tambourines in worship.

**Sadly more people divide over issues not pertaining to the Gospel.**

#### **4. Paul's Ambition (1:10)**

This verse is a transitional verse, linking the previous and next sections. Paul expresses his ambition to please Christ not men

**10a-b:** Apparently some thought Paul was not preaching circumcision and the law as a requirement because he wanted to gain favor with the Gentiles. The next phrase, shows that he has no interest in pleasing people – his goal is pleasing God by preaching his gospel.

**10c:** IF Paul would have desired to please people he would have never become a servant of Christ. *He was admired by many as a Pharisee; if his goal was admiration, he would have no need to leave that system.*

- Pharisees "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another not and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God." (**John 5:44**)

Paul cares more for the glory of Christ, the health of the church, and the souls of men and women, than the approval of people.

- If your goal in life is to be liked, you won't be very faithful to Christ. "**But they won't think I'm cool.**" Your not. Move on.

Who do you long to please? Whose approval matters most?

Proverbs says, “The Fear of man is a snare.” (Prov. 29:25). The word “fear” means to “reverence,” to “stand in awe of” to **“worship”** in the Bible.

**Approval of people is idolatry. You are worshiping a person, not God. Timidity is a worship issue! You are worshiping man, not God.**

*I'd rather have Jesus than men's applause;  
I'd rather be faithful to His dear cause;  
I'd rather have Jesus than world-wide fame,  
I'd rather be true to His holy name.*

**This is the spirit of Athanasius, our leader at the council of Nicea, arguing for the biblical Jesus, in a day in which it wasn't popular .... They said, “Athanasius, The whole world is against you.” He said, "Then I'm against the whole world.”**

**Are you a servant of Christ? This Christ who came to please the Father. This Christ who gives grace. This sinless savior who became the curse for us, so that we could be made right with God. Do not turn away from him who died in your place for your sins. He will free you if you will repent and believe.**