

THE GOOD NEWS OF GOD'S GRACE IS THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW GOD

Galatians 1:6-10

Please review this week's catechism question.

INTRODUCTION

A. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Why or why not? "Moral and religious truth is relative, depending upon the culture, background, preferences and experiences of each individual."

B. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1=I know I do not know what is true. 10=everything I believe is the truth and nothing but the truth.), how certain are you that what you believe about God, about salvation, about morality is absolutely true? How confident are you that everyone else in the world, regardless of race or culture should believe exactly what you believe about religious and moral questions? Why did you pick that number?

C. What are some of the consequences of believing that everything you believe is absolutely true? What are some of the consequences of believing that there is no final, absolute truth?

D. How do you feel about people who are certain they are correct about moral and religious questions?

E. In vv. 6-7 Paul says that the Galatian churches are in the process of turning away from the gospel of Christ that he taught them the first time he was with them. How does Paul feel about what they are in the process of doing?

These five verses are the most sobering of verses. He begins these verses with a strong statement of his shock and amazement at the Galatians willingness to listen to the false teachers who have come to them. He is outraged and befuddled by their inability to see what is so plain to him, that what the false teachers are saying, while they claim

it is the gospel of Christ, is no gospel at all. The amazement he feels is like that of the parent whose teenager shows up one night with a huge, permanent tattoo on his forearm. "Have you taken leave of your senses? Don't you know that thing is permanent?" It's the shock a parent might feel if her college student son calls home in the middle of the semester and says he is dropping out of college and he and a buddy are going to hitchhike across the U.S. for the next six months. "Don't you have any brains? What are you going to live on? What about all the money we already paid for college?" It's the shock you feel when your best friend tells you, out of the blue, he is going to leave his wife and children and move in with a woman 20 years younger. "Are you crazy? Don't you know what kind of chaos you are bringing into your life and the life of your children?"

The apostle Paul is absolutely convinced that what you believe about God and about salvation is of the utmost importance. He believes the content of your faith, your theology, is the most important thing about you. The question for Paul is not whether or not you will have a theology, because everyone has a theology, but what your theology says. In this passage we will discover why Paul believes that what people believe is so important.

STUDY

1. According to v. 6 what is true of everyone who does not believe the gospel of Christ as Paul taught it to the Galatians when he was with them?

The first thing that Paul tells these people is that if they abandon the gospel of Christ which he taught, they are not merely changing their philosophy. They are not merely exchanging one set of beliefs for another. They are not just adopting a new way of thinking. Rather, if they or anyone does not agree with the gospel of Christ exactly as Paul taught it, then they are turning away from "the God who calls you by the grace of Christ." To believe different from the gospel of Christ as Paul taught it is to personally desert God. It is to turn your back on the only true and living God. The gospel is not merely stating ideas about God and salvation. To abandon this gospel is to abandon the God who saves through it.

2. Why does Paul emphasize that to turn away from the gospel as he taught it is to turn away from the “God who calls you by the grace of Christ?” What is his point by describing God in this way? Consider 2 Thess. 2:12, Romans 5:6,8, 8:28-30, 9:10-13, 1 Peter 2:10.

This message of the gospel is the power, which God exercises to call people out of the deadness and darkness of sin and hell and into the kingdom of his beloved Son, into the kingdom of his marvelous light. All other “gospels” are about what humans must do to work their way into heaven. This gospel however, is about God’s power to create light out of darkness, to make alive what is dead, to produce righteousness where only sin existed. This call is not simply an invitation but a command that gives the ability to obey the command. He commands that we trust in Christ alone and he gives us the power to trust in Christ alone, through the gospel. To turn away from this gospel is to turn away from the grace of Christ. The gospel of Christ is the only message that reveals and applies the grace that he gives. Why did the eternal Son of God leave his Father’s side and be born as a man? Why did he do the will of God every moment of his entire life? Why is it that he willingly went to the cross and bore the horror of hell? He did it because he delights to not treat sinners as they deserve but to do good to them contrary to what we deserve. He did it so that God the Father could justly treat sinners like us as if we were always obedient children who never once sinned. When you deviate from the gospel of Christ you leave grace behind and must seek to relate to God on the basis of what you have performed, what you have done, not upon the basis of what Christ has done. You seek to have God judge you based on your own merits, not the merits of Jesus Christ.

You should enthusiastically evaluate the content of your faith because to turn away from the gospel of Christ is to turn away from God and his grace.

3. A literal translation of v. 7 goes like this: “...which is not another (gospel), except that there are some who are troubling you and wanting to pervert the gospel of Christ.” What does Paul say that those who are teaching a false gospel are doing to the churches of Galatia?

He says they are troubling these churches by their false teaching.

4. Here are a few of the other places in the NT where this same verb “to trouble” is used: Matthew 2:3, 14:26, John 11:33 and Acts 17:13. Read them and describe what this word indicates was going on in these churches. Compare Galatians 5:15.

This verb is a very strong word and most often refers to a very unsettled and tumultuous emotional state. It is the trouble you feel when someone you love and trust has betrayed you. It is the emotional distress you experience when you see a ghost or an angel or the resurrected Christ. It is how people feel when confronted with the death of a loved one or with being abandoned by God. It is the stirred up emotional state of a mob. It is the emotional trouble that is felt by those who are persecuted. In other words, this false gospel was stirring up an emotional cauldron in these churches. Rather than these Christians living together in the peace of Christ, there was an enormous amount of conflict and turmoil going on. Paul describes the state of these churches as a result of these false teachers in Galatians 5:15, “If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.”

5. What are some ways that a “gospel” that emphasizes human performance will bring trouble to a church?

False gospels, man-centered gospels promote fighting and competition. The reason false gospels bring trouble into churches is because false gospels do not humble people and exalt God, rather they exalt people and despise God. When your system of salvation is rooted in human performance then those humans who perform better look down upon those who don’t perform as well. False gospels promote comparison and evaluation of self and others. Self-righteousness and judgment and criticism and envy fill churches that teach any gospel but the gospel of Christ. The hearts of individuals who are embracing another gospel are filled with these fellowship-destroying emotions and thus they bring their poison into the fellowship. It is as James says in his letter (3:16), “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.” Nothing promotes envy and selfish ambition like false

gospels that teach that God saves human beings because of what human beings do or because human beings are valuable or because human beings are not slaves to sin but free to believe.

6. What are some ways you have seen man-centered “gospels” bring trouble into Christian relationships? What are some ways you have seen the true gospel promote peace and harmony among Christians?

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7. According to vv. 8-9 what will happen to anyone who preaches a gospel other than the one Paul preached the first time he visited the Galatians and which they received?

Paul, as plainly as you can state it, says that if you don't agree with what he taught the Galatians on his visit to their cities, which they received, you will go to hell forever. Everyone who disagrees with him, even at the smallest point, is under God's curse and will be eternally rejected by God.

8. Why does Paul include himself and angels under this curse?

He isn't claiming that he is right and they should believe what he says because of who he is. Rather, his point is that there is a message that he was given that he told to them and that they received. They should listen to him, not because of his brilliance but because of the brilliance of the message. If he were to ever disagree with what he told them or to change his mind about it in any way, he too would be subject to the same fate as those false teachers. He says, “May God curse me and send me to hell if I ever disagree with the message I delivered to you.” Not only should he be damned if he disagrees but even if it were possible and an angel from heaven came and told you a different message, that angel will be damned to hell. His point is that the message as he delivered it is the only true message and anyone or any being that disagrees, no matter who they are or what they claim about themselves, they are wrong and will suffer forever in hell for teaching a false gospel.

9. Can you imagine yourself saying this to another person? Why or why not?

10. Does eternal condemnation seem an excessive punishment to you for merely believing wrong doctrine? Why or why not?

11. Why is it that Paul does not view this as excessive punishment? See Genesis 2:15-17, Deut. 13:12-16, 18:14-20, Romans 6:23, Galatians 3:10 & 13, Hebrews 2:1-3, 10:26-31, 12:25.

There are two reasons this is not excessive. First, the wages of sin is death. The only people who will go to heaven are those who are perfectly righteous. If you do not believe the gospel, that means you are depending upon your own righteousness to gain heaven. You must pay for your own sins. Therefore, to reject Christ is to place yourself under the curse of God because “Cursed is everyone who does not do everything written in the curse of the law.” Sin must be paid for and if you do not depend upon Christ as the satisfaction of God's law in his obedience and in his death, then you must rely upon yourself and thus you will perish. The second reason this is not excessive is because when you refuse the gospel you are offending the God who alone is worthy of trust and praise and obedience. You are not just disobeying your mother but the majestic, eternal King of the universe upon whom your entire existence depends. We all know that punishment to be just must be proportional to the evil of the offense. When you despise a being to whom you owe infinite obedience the only punishment that could possibly “fit” is an infinite punishment. Here is an illustration to capture this point: Paul Ryan is the Congressman for the 1st Congressional District in Wisconsin of which Janesville is a part. What if I went on the morning news program on the local radio station, WCLO and broadcast that Rep. Ryan, who represents all the citizens in this district would only talk with and help those who gave at least \$1000 to his election campaign. Not only did I say this on the radio but the TV stations out of Madison, the newspapers in southern WI also interviewed me and I sent out a letter to every home in the district making the same claim. My claim is not true. I have no proof that this is true. What will happen to me if I do this? I will be

prosecuted for libel and slander. I will go to jail and have to pay huge sums of money to Rep. Ryan and to the state of WI. What did I do? All I did was state my belief that Rep. Ryan requires a \$1000 bribe before he will help you. What's the big deal? The big deal is that I am defaming his character and harming our governing institutions by making these claims. Why is it so wrong to defame a mere human in this way but not wrong to defame the God who made the world and holds it together? Why is it right for me to be punished in such an excessive way for slandering one man but wrong for those who slander the eternal God to be punished with an eternal hell? The only reason we think that an eternal hell is way out of proportion to the offense of believing a few wrong things is because we think so little of God.

You should enthusiastically evaluate the content of your faith because to turn away from the gospel of Christ is to bring God's fury upon you.

12. Based on the questions Paul asks in v. 10 what can we assume is another of the charges that the false teachers were leveling at him? What possible reasons could they have for making this accusation? See Acts 16:3, 21:17-26 & Romans 4:5.

They were accusing him of being a man pleaser, rather than a God pleaser. The grounds upon which they would make this claim are at least these two. First, they claimed that Paul was seeking to be popular with people by telling people that they could be forgiven of their sins and belong to the people of God by doing nothing, but simply by believing that Jesus Christ had done it all. His gospel was people friendly because it required nothing of anyone, whereas they were teaching a gospel that required people to do something. He said that God justified the wicked which means wicked people go to heaven, which is a man pleasing idea. The second ground of their accusation was Paul's behavior. Sometimes Paul lived like a Jewish person and sometimes he lived like a Gentile. He required Timothy to be circumcised but not Titus. When he was in Jerusalem he acted like a Jew. The false teachers claimed Paul did this in order to please whomever he was with. He was like a good politician and did whatever would make the people he happened to be with happy.

13. What evidence does Paul point to in v. 10 to show that he is not trying to please men but God?

Paul's answer in v. 10 to this accusation is to ask whether what he has just said sounds like a person who is trying to gain the approval of men? If he were concerned with whether or not the Galatians respected him he would not have just said what he said. You don't win friends and influence people by telling them they will go to hell unless they agree with you. People don't respond well to those kinds of ultimatums. The fact that he is confronting the Galatians in such an open and aggressive way shows that he is not trying to seek their approval. He is not trying to please men. Then he goes on to say that it is impossible to be both a servant of Christ and to seek to please people in the way they are accusing him of doing. If you care about what people think about you, you will not faithfully represent Christ and his gospel. You will change the message of Christ if your goal is to get people to like you because the gospel of Christ is offensive to every natural man. Telling people they are sinners with no ability to do good and deserving of nothing but eternal damnation is not a popular message but if you care about what God thinks of you, it is the message you will preach and believe. This is the message of Paul and therefore proves that he is a servant of Christ, not a man-pleaser, in contrast to the false teachers who tell people they can do things to gain heaven.

14. How does your life and your words show that you are not trying to please men but God? What evidence is there in your life that you are a servant of Christ?

You should enthusiastically evaluate the content of your faith because to turn away from the gospel of Christ is to please men, not God.