

## Galatians 1:6-9 "The Solas of Salvation"\*

Proposition: According to Galatians 1:6-9, we are facing two situations, as did the Galatian church. Both lead us to affirm the solas of salvation.

I. The church is facing danger (6-7).

A. One is a lack of discernment (6).

1. The Galatians were turning from God.
2. The Galatians were turning to a different gospel.

B. A second is the lure of deception (7).

1. False teachers were disturbing the church.
2. False teachers were distorting the gospel.

II. The church is facing a decision (8-9).

A. We must reject the different gospel.

B. We must affirm the delivered gospel.

1. It's Scripture alone (not human opinion).
2. It's grace alone (not human merit).
3. It's Christ alone (not human contribution).
4. It's faith alone (not human effort).

Implications: What does God want us to do with the gospel?

1. We must understand it.
2. We must accept it.
3. We must spread it.

What makes Christianity *Christian*? Five centuries ago, a battle raged in the Church in Europe, in what became known as the Protestant Reformation. A revival of New Testament Christianity resulted. Reformers like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldreich Zwingli called upon the Church to affirm such non-negotiables as the following: *sola Scriptura*, *sola gratia*, and *sola fide*. And the world was changed.

*Sola*. It's a small word, a Latin word. *Sola* means "only" or "alone." As a theological term, it deals with essentials, with fundamentals. It helps us to identify true, biblical Christianity.

That's not easy to do in our day. The problem is not that there aren't a lot of people who call themselves Christians. The problem is that there *are*. The polls reveal that a substantial segment of the American public describes itself as "Christian." Just think of the people you know. But are they *Christian* in the biblical sense of the term?

The following may shock you, but I believe I can substantiate it. One of the greatest mission fields in America today is the *Church* itself. "The Church?" Yes, the Church.

In 1994, Michael Horton conducted a survey at the "Christian Booksellers Association" convention. The *CBA*

is the largest evangelical industry for so-called evangelism in the evangelical world. The CBA is one of the top five conventions in the United States in terms of dollars. It's a massive enterprise.

Michael Horton is a noted author and speaker who is concerned for the condition of the American Church. At the CBA convention, Horton mingled with Christian publishers, authors, and pastors at their displays. He says he saw the word "gospel" plastered everywhere. So he conducted a poll interview--six hours worth--and asked the people responsible for the *Christian* books we read to answer the following questions.

*Question:* What is the "gospel" to you? One exhibitor responded, "Well, it's not really tangible. It's personal. You must find it within yourself." Another answered, "The gospel? It means you love the Lord, you love yourself, and you love other human beings." Still others said things like, "It means good news." "You do your best." "I don't know. All I know is that I love the Lord with all my heart."

*Another question:* "What does justification mean?" Several CBA exhibitors answered, "I don't know." Others said things like, "I can't answer all these questions. I just know I'm born again." In six hours of taping, only two people came remotely close to the biblical answer. Yet Martin Luther said *justification* is *the* doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls.

I share this not to be caustic, but to point out a serious problem. These are individuals who call themselves *Christian*, and indeed are influential leaders in *Christian* publishing. Yet person after person exhibited a fuzzy understanding (or none at all) about how the Bible says a person *becomes* a Christian! My friend, the gospel is under attack today, not just from outside the church, but from inside it.

It's been that way from the very beginning. It was this very problem that prompted Paul to write the book of Galatians, where we'll find the text of today's study.

What makes Christianity *Christian*? What is so essential that if a person does not believe it, he is not a biblical Christian? In our series, I am proposing five fundamentals: 1) The Superiority of God, 2) The Supremacy of Christ, and 3) The Sufficiency of Scripture. We looked at these three in our previous messages. Today we come to the fourth fundamental, *The Solas of Salvation*. The issue is this--How does a person enter a relationship with God? How does an individual become a Christian? What is the gospel message that a person must believe in order to be saved?

The book of Galatians makes it clear that this is a non-negotiable issue. As we'll see in Galatians 1:6-9, we are facing two situations, as did the Galatian church. Both lead us to affirm the *solas* of salvation.

### I. The church is facing danger (6-7).

Notice verse 6, "I am astonished." Stop there. According to verse 1, Paul wrote this letter. But there's something very different about Galatians. Unlike all the other letters Paul wrote, there's no warm introduction here, no words of thanksgiving or commendation like we usually find. He gets right to the punchline, "I am *astonished*."

Why was Paul so blunt when he penned Galatians? What life-and-death matter gripped him to write in such stern terms? It was this. The church was facing danger. It was plagued by a twofold danger, the same which confronts the American Church today.

A. One is a lack of discernment (6). "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel." Paul knew his readers well. He led them to Christ during his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14), and continued to pray for them after he left. Then he received some heart-wrenching news. Some teachers in Galatia were undermining his work. They were teaching heresy. What's worse, the church members were falling for it. Their lack of discernment surfaced in two ways.

1. *The Galatians were turning from God.* "I marvel that you are so soon removed from Him that called you (KJV)." The verb "removed" ("deserting" in the NIV) should be active, not passive (it's in the middle voice), and it should be present, not past tense. At that very moment, the Galatians were in the process of deserting.

The Greek word *metatithemi* is quite illustrative. It means "to transfer one's allegiance." It was used to describe a soldier who deserted his post, or of a man who changed sides in politics. For instance, when Dionysius left the Stoics to become a member of the rival Epicurean school, he was labeled with this word: a "turncoat."

That was the crime of which Paul accused the Galatians. They were religious turncoats. They were spiritual deserters.

What had they done? They were deserting the One who had called them by His grace. They were turning from God. Their lack of discernment surfaced in a second way.

2. *The Galatians were turning to a different gospel.* That's what the end of verse 6 reveals. A *different* gospel. That's a strong charge.

In our day, one church uses written prayers and another extemporaneous. One church uses contemporary Bible translations, while another uses only the AV. One church uses elders, while another has deacons. One church a variety of music styles, while another uses only the Psalter for worship. Churches are different. That's fine.

But to say a church is preaching a *different* gospel--now we've moved from preferences to fundamentals. The gospel is a non-negotiable. An essential. Without it, a church ceases to be a *Christian* church. We may doubt that in our day of, "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you believe in God--the particulars don't matter."

But it does. Paul's charge is clear. To turn to another gospel is to turn from God! The particulars *do* matter. Faith is only as good as its object.

You may be wondering, "What was this *different* gospel that mesmerized the Galatians?" Paul hints at it in verse 7. There he reveals the other side of the danger that's facing the church in both his day and ours. The first is a lack of discernment.

B. A second is the lure of deception (7). That's a dangerous combination--to put a person with a lack of discernment and a person skilled at the lure of deception in the same room.

Listen to verses 6-7, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel--which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." What were the false teachers doing in Galatia? Two deceptive activities...

1. *False teachers were disturbing the church.* Paul says, "There are some that trouble you." The teachers were confusing the Christians.

How were they doing it? And who were they? Acts 15:1 paints a likely scenario, "Some men came down from Judea to Antioch, and were teaching the brothers: Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved."

Talk about causing an uproar! How would you respond if some teachers came to town and said, "Greetings,

friends. We're from Church Headquarters. We heard you've asked Jesus to be your Savior. That's fine, but if you want to be saved, you need to do something else. You need to keep the Mosaic Law. If you don't, you cannot be saved..."?

Using tactics of intimidation, these heretics were disturbing the Galatian church. They also committed a second deceptive activity.

2. *False teachers were distorting the gospel.* In verse 7, Paul says the opponents were "trying to pervert the gospel of Christ." The false teachers were Judaizers, Jews that preached a gospel of works. How were they distorting the gospel? By telling the Christians, "Unless you are circumcised, you cannot be saved."

Their approach was very subtle. If you had lived in Galatia, and had opportunity to dialogue with the Judaizers, you might have been surprised. The average American Christian probably would have fallen for their line just like the Galatians did.

Suppose you asked a Judaizer these questions: Do you believe in Jesus? His response, "Oh, yes." Well, do you believe that Jesus lived a perfect life and died on a cross? "Certainly." Do you believe that Jesus rose from the dead, and is in heaven today? "Yes, I do." Do you believe that Jesus shed His blood for our sins? Again, his answer, "Yes." Well, how about this--do you believe that Jesus is coming again? And he looks at you and replies, "Yes, yes, yes!"

Now, tell me. Is your Judaizer-friend a Christian? The answer is *no*. "But," you say, "he believes in Jesus! He believes in the blood! He believes in the resurrection! He believes what *we* believe, doesn't he?"

No, he doesn't. Just ask him one more question, and you'll see. "Mr. Judaizer, do you believe that faith in Christ *alone* is sufficient to save?" And he will answer, "No, believing in Jesus isn't enough. You need to finish what Christ began. You need to add *your* works to the work of Christ. You must finish Christ's unfinished work."

So now what do you think of our friend's spiritual condition? Paul would say our friend believes in a *different* gospel, a *perverted* gospel. That's serious business.

"Are you saying, Pastor, that it's possible to claim to be a Christian, and not be one?" Yes, it is. "Are you saying that a person can believe in Jesus, and not be a Christian?" Yes, he or she can. The demons believe in Jesus, but they're not saved. Many of the cults believe in Jesus. The issue is this. What Jesus do you believe in? Do you believe in the Jesus of the Bible? Do you believe in the *gospel* of the Bible?

Herein lies the danger that the church is facing. Which brings us to the second situation that faced the Galatian church.

## II. The church is facing a decision (8-9).

When the gospel is being undermined, we've got a decision to make. It's twofold.

A. We must reject the *different* gospel. Verses 8-9, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!"

Wow! To change the gospel is grounds for condemnation! Now do you see why Paul didn't begin his letter with his customary greeting? When eternal life and eternal death are hanging in the balance, it's no time for small-talk. When a person in ICU is coded, it's no time to chat about fly-fishing. When a church is coded--and that's what was happening in Galatia--what's needed is drastic action.

That's exactly what Paul calls us to do here. Reject *anyone*--whether it's angel from heaven or the apostle himself--*anyone* who preaches a different gospel!

This is no trivial matter to me. In my early childhood years, I attended a large, mainline, denominational church. But I never heard the gospel. I heard a different gospel. True, they were nice people, many of them upstanding citizens in the community. But week after week, I went to "church" and never the *gospel*. Oh, I heard about Jesus. I learned that He was to be my example. But I didn't hear that I needed Him as my *Savior*. I am eternally grateful that God in His providence moved my family to a Bible-teaching church.

We must reject the different gospel. That's what God's Word says. British theologian and author, John R.W. Stott offers this counsel (27-8), "We are not to be dazzled, as many people are, by the person, gifts or office of teachers in the church. They may come to us with great dignity, authority and scholarship. They may be bishops or archbishops, university professors or even the pope himself. But if they bring a gospel other than the gospel preached by the apostles and recorded in the New Testament, they are to be rejected. We judge them by the gospel; we do not judge the gospel by them."

There's more. We face a twofold decision. First, we must reject the *different* gospel.

B. We must affirm the **delivered** gospel. Just what *is* the gospel? It's one thing to critique what we *don't* believe, but what do we believe? What *must* we believe? What are the ingredients of the true gospel? That's what Paul explains in the rest of the this letter. There are four characteristics of the gospel, four *solas*, that are non-negotiable.

1. *It's Scripture alone (not human opinion)*. In verse 8, Paul says the true gospel is "the one we preached to you," and according to verse 9, it's the one "you accepted." It's the *delivered* gospel.

We can't emphasize this enough in this most-modern culture that places more stock in experience than in truth. Christianity is rooted in a historical, objective, revealed account. God recorded that account in Scripture. The gospel isn't based on human opinion.

Paul explains in verses 11-12, "I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel I preached is not something that man made up. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ." And what Paul and the apostles received from Christ, they recorded in what we call the New Testament. The first characteristic of the gospel is *sola Scriptura*. Our authority is Scripture alone.

2. *It's grace alone (not human merit)*. Galatians is packed with grace. Just listen: Verse 3, "*Grace* and peace to you." Verse 6, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the *grace* of Christ." In verse 15, Paul shares his testimony: "God...called me by his *grace*."

We don't initiate salvation. God does. And we don't finish salvation. God does. We don't meet God half-way. God calls us. God keeps us. God finishes what He starts with us, on the basis of His *grace*, His unmerited favor. The last verse of chapter two (2:21) reveals that if that's not true, then Christ died for nothing. Indeed, the final verse of the book speaks of grace (6:18). We end where we begin, with an utter dependence upon the grace of God. Now a third characteristic of the delivered gospel...

3. *Its Christ alone (not human contribution)*. Paul calls it the "*gospel of Christ*" in 1:7. We are made right with God by the atoning work of Christ *alone*.

It's ironic that this very morning in various "churches" across our land, people will sing hymns that proclaim salvation by grace, yet hear sermons that present salvation by works. They'll sing the words of Isaac Watts, "When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride." And then they'll hear a man of the cloth tell them, "God loves you. Do you

best, and some day you'll go to heaven."

My friend, God says "our best" is like filthy rags to Him (Isa. 64:6)! It's Christ alone who can rescue us. That's the note on which Paul begins this letter (1:3-4), "Grace and peace to you from...the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age..."

That's why the gospel cuts across all barriers (acc. to 3:26-29). Race doesn't matter, nor economic status, nor gender. All people may and must come to God the same way--through Christ alone. There's one more characteristic of the delivered gospel...

4. *It's faith alone (not human effort)*. Here's the crux of the gospel. *Sola fide*. It's what set Martin Luther free.

Luther was a Roman Catholic monk in his early years, and more than anything, he wanted to be right with God. He spent sleepless nights in prayer and fasting. He confessed his sins everyday because he was told this would insure a right standing with God. One day, his monastic superior, Father Johann Staupitz told Luther to leave the confessional and not return until he had something really sinful to confess! But all Luther desired was to get rid of his horrible burden of guilt and shame. As he put it, "I...was perpetually in torment."

Luther knew that God demands righteousness from us. But try as we might, we can't achieve righteousness. We can't attain God's standard. For Luther, the light dawned one day when reading Romans 1:16-17, "I am not ashamed of the *gospel*, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who *believes*...For in the *gospel* a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is through *faith*..."

That's it! The solution is the gospel! We are rescued *sola fide*. We are saved by faith, but it's not really faith that saves us. Faith just plugs us into Christ who saves us (Eph. 2:8-9). It's no wonder that Paul uses the word "faith" 22 times in Galatians (esp. in ch 3).

"But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through *faith* in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe (3:22)." "So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by *faith* (3:24)." "You are all sons of God through *faith* in Christ Jesus (3:26)."

It's faith alone. We are made right with God (that's justification) based on what *Christ* did for us, not what we did (or didn't do) for God. Now, let's talk about implications...

Implications: What does God want us to do with the gospel?

His Word tells us to do three things with it...

1. *We must understand it*. You will not be saved by believing just *anything*. Nor will your family members and friends. It must be the *gospel*. We must discern the gospel. Indeed, we must defend the gospel (Jude 3). It is a fundamental, an essential.

Do you understand the gospel? Do you grasp the severity of your condition, that you are a sinner who cannot reach God? Do you realize that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, died as a ransom payment for sin, and rose again, and that He alone can save us? No one has ever become a Christian without first *understanding* the gospel. On the other hand, no person has ever become a Christian merely by understanding the gospel, for...

2. *We must accept it*. 1 Corinthians 15:3 says we must personalize the gospel, "Christ died *for our sins*, according to the Scriptures." To be right with God, you must accept the gospel. You must accept Christ, and place your trust in Him once and for all. Have you ever done that? If you have, you and I have a third responsibility with the gospel...

3. *We must spread it.* Jesus said in Mark 16:15, "Go into all the world and preach the *gospel* to every creature." Will you commit yourself today to this task?