

## WHEELERSBURG BAPTIST CHURCH

### *A COMMITMENT TO THE GOSPEL*

Galatians 1:1-12

October 2, 2012

You have six examples of popular modern gospels in your notes. What I want you to do is listen to each message and then decide if this is the true gospel. At the conclusion of the message today, I am going to re-read all six of these and see if you have changed your assessment.

**Gospel #1 The good news is that God is the Father of every human being and reaches out in many ways to mankind.** He is like the hub of a wheel, and there are many spokes that lead to Him. Most people in our culture understand that the way to God is Jesus, and people with other backgrounds and in other religions have their path to God. I need to follow my conscience and practice a good, moral religion. What people need is faith in God and to be accepting of others beliefs.

**Gospel #2 The good news is that we can transform society by bringing our Christian values to the culture.** We can influence social and political decisions in key areas such as abortion, homosexuality, family values, education and literacy, prayer in school, and healthcare reform. What people need to do is get more involved in the community and politics to effect positive change.

**Gospel #3 The good news is that God loves everybody and wants to answer their prayers.** All we have to do is ask Him for what we want or need, and He will help us. What people need to do is to pray more and ask God for help.

**Gospel #4 The good news is that God is merciful and forgiving.** If I try to live a good life, stay in church, live by the golden rule by doing good to other people, and follow Jesus' example as his disciple, God understands that I am doing the best I can and when I die I will go to heaven. What people need to do is follow Jesus and try to live like Him and ask Him to forgive them when they mess up.

**Gospel #5 The good news is that all people are God's children, made in his image, and therefore are good.** What they need is love, encouragement and inspiration to live up to their full potential and fight off the bad. We need to help them discover the goodness that is inside of them so they can live a rich and full life. What people need is the support of others so they can be motivated and inspired to live right by better understanding themselves and others.

**Gospel #6 The good news is that if I pray and ask Jesus to come into my heart, then I can be saved.** Once I believe in Jesus, all is settled. I can live my life however I want to, and God will understand and forgive me, because I made a decision and asked Him into my heart. The good news is that I finally gave in, did what God wanted me to do, and made things right with Him. Some of the things that I did were raising my hand when the preacher asked who wanted to be saved, I got baptized, I went forward during the invitation, and I went to the altar and prayed through. What people need is to do is believe in Jesus and ask Him into their hearts.

We are currently considering the nine marks of a healthy church based on a book by Pastor Mark Dever entitled "What is a healthy church?" From his understanding of the Scriptures, he proposes nine marks that will be evident and present in a healthy church. The first three are essential marks: Expository Preaching, Biblical

Theology, and a Biblical Understanding of the Gospel. The other six marks are classified as important and include a biblical understanding of conversion, a biblical understanding of evangelism, a biblical understanding of membership, biblical church discipline, biblical discipleship and growth, and biblical church leadership.

On Sunday mornings we are listening to a message on each mark, and then we gather on Sunday evenings in small groups to discuss each one. I encourage you to come back this evening at 6 to do that. Today we are considering the third mark of a healthy church, a commitment to a biblical understanding of the gospel. There is certainly much confusion in the religious marketplace concerning the gospel.

Here's where we are headed. First, we are going to do a brief study of the first 12 verses of Galatians chapter 1 and draw out some principles concerning the gospel from this study.

Then we will examine the topical question "What exactly is the true gospel? I will offer a definition for the true gospel, then we will consider several essential tenants of the true gospel message. After making some application, we will return to our six popular gospel messages for you to re-evaluate. I want to finish this morning with a story about the power of the gospel. My goal is for you to grow in your appreciation of the true gospel and be better equipped to defend it and share it with others. So let's get started in Galatians chapter 1.

Paul had heard that these churches in the region of Galatia were infiltrated with false teachers, and the members were starting to follow false teaching concerning the gospel. These false teachers asserted that to be accepted by God you had to believe in Jesus Christ and also observe the Jewish law. They were requiring non-Jewish people who wanted to be followers of Christ to submit to the Jewish ceremonial laws like circumcision. Paul wrote this letter to wake them up and call them back to the truth.

### **READ Galatians 1:1-12**

*Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the churches in Galatia:*

*<sup>3</sup> Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

*<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But 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! <sup>9</sup> As 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! <sup>10</sup> Am 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.*

*Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—<sup>2</sup> and all the brothers and sisters with me, to the churches in Galatia:*

Paul establishes his authority, that it is directly from God, and not from man. The word apostle means one who is sent. Paul clearly states that he had been personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ and got his message by direct revelation.

<sup>3</sup> *Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>4</sup> who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, <sup>5</sup> to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

Paul begins his letter with a clear statement of the gospel, that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins and has rescued us from our sinful state, all in accordance with the sovereign will of the Father, and all for His honor and glory. Even in the two words, grace and peace, you have the gospel – God’s unmerited work and favor, His grace, and the effect of that grace, peace with God and reconciliation.

<sup>6</sup> *I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*

Unlike his other letters, Paul does not commend these believers, but begins with a strong statement of surprise and shock. In no uncertain terms, he cuts to the subject at hand and expresses his astonishment and dismay at their abandonment of the truth. He wants them to know that they have deserted the Lord Jesus Christ himself by following a perverted gospel. Paul says that there is only one true gospel, and any other version is no gospel at all. We must affirm the same. Any addition to or subtraction from the gospel must be clearly called out for what it is and rejected. Otherwise we will find ourselves in the position of denying the Lord Himself.

<sup>8</sup> *But 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! <sup>9</sup> As 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!*

Paul states clearly that he has the one and only true gospel, and that anyone who proclaims or preaches a message that would pervert or disagree with that gospel, they are under God’s condemnation. He said it twice just to be perfectly clear.

<sup>10</sup> *Am 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.*

Paul’s point in verse 10 is that such language, candor, and boldness wins no favors from people. He is on a mission and his allegiance is to the One who sent Him. People pleasing won’t cut it when you are called to proclaim the truth. God’s word is a hammer, and a sword, and it exposes and cuts and condemns all that opposes it.

So what are some principles that we learn from this passage?

1. There are false teachers in the world and in the church that proclaim messages that they say are from God. They use the Bible and use Christian terminology, but they have a twisted, confused message. If someone believes these false messages, they are essentially abandoning the Lord Jesus Christ and proving themselves not to be a true believer. These false teachings say lots of right things, but it’s what is left out or added that creates the problem.
2. Therefore, it is essential, especially when dealing with error that affects the gospel, to be harsh, direct, and severe in your assessment and response.
3. True servants who are called to proclaim the gospel must understand that their message is offensive and displeasing to many people, but must boldly declare the truth and disregard the fear of man.

4. The true gospel is the only gospel that has the power to save a person from their sins and bring them into a relationship with God. It is a gospel of the grace of God, not the works of men.
5. The authority of a preacher lies solely in the message he proclaims. If he proclaims a message different from the revealed apostolic message in the Scripture, he is a false teacher and is under God's judgment.

This passage in Galatians compels us to take a very careful and close look at what is the true gospel. My question for you right now is do you know succinctly and clearly how to the answer to that question? Spiritual lives are at stake. So in light of that, let's invest some time in examining what is the true gospel.

First, I want to offer a definition and another passage of Scripture to help us. Here's a definition:

The Gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ, the righteous Son of God came to earth, sent here by God the Father, lived a perfect life of obedience, died upon the cross at Calvary for sinners, bearing the guilt and punishment for their sins, and rose from the dead. Through His work, Jesus Christ alone provides both forgiveness from one's sins and presents one as righteous before God the Father.

I Corinthians 15:1-8

*Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. <sup>2</sup>By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. <sup>3</sup>For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup>After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup>Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup>and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

Based on this definition and the passage in I Corinthians, I want you to carefully note the following distinction:

The Gospel is what Jesus Christ has done for His people, not what they have done for Him. This is a critical distinction when evaluating modern gospels. The true gospel is a gospel of grace. That means that salvation is of the Lord. The true gospel message is all about His work, His life, His death, His will, His provision, His calling, His life – it is all about Him. Though the gospel produces some amazing effects and blessings in our lives, these effects, such as regeneration, holy living, repentance, faith, and the fruit of the Spirit are not the gospel, but the effects of the gospel. The gospel is a message centered on Jesus Christ and His work, not man and his work. It is about what God has done, not what we have done. It is about satisfying God's righteousness and the fulfillment of His plan, not about our lives and our plans. It is about God's glory, not ours. It is about God's love for us, not our love for Him. We certainly do love Him, but it because He first loved us. But we must remember He died for us while we were yet sinners. All that He accomplished for us in His life and death is totally unmerited and undeserved by us. Many modern gospel presentations center on man, not Jesus Christ. Now let's look at closer at five essential components of the true gospel.

The first is a Biblical concept of the nature and person of God. God is not just a bigger version of man (the man upstairs), but He is transcendent. God is the creator and sustainer of all matter and life, and therefore has the right to demand and require the creation's obedience and loyalty. Revelation 4:11 states it this way:<sup>11</sup> *"You are worthy, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."* I John 1:5 states <sup>5</sup>*This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all.*

A second essential element is what the scriptures teach about man. The Bible teaches that man is God's creation. Man is finite, limited, and weak, as opposed to God who is infinite and omnipotent. Man is flesh (out of the dust of the ground) as opposed to God who is spirit. Though man is flesh, he has a spirit, being created in the image of God. God breathed life (spirit) into man's body that was made from the dust, and man became a living soul. Because he is created in God's image, he is distinct from the animal creation. As such, man is moral, that is, he has a conscience and an understanding of right and wrong. He can reason, and has the ability to make moral choices. Man's ability to choose makes him morally responsible. The first man, Adam, chose to disobey God, and became a sinner and guilty of God's judgment. The sentence of judgment passed to Adam and his descendents is physical and spiritual death. All men thereafter, as descendents of Adam, are sinners by nature and born into this world under God's judgment. This sinful nature (total depravity) manifests itself in sinful actions, motives, and choices. Apart from God's grace, no person seeks God, but each one is totally consumed with themselves and their selfish desires.

This leads to a third essential element, the doctrine of sin. Sin is the root of all of man's problems. Man is a sinner by nature (through Adam) and a sinner by choice (the outward actions based on that nature). Sin needs to be understood as an offense first and foremost to God. It is a falling short of God's standard. Because of our sin, we are guilty before a holy God and His enemy. The good news is that God has provided the remedy for man's biggest need, the removal of sin, which leads us to the fourth element, which is an understanding of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the essence of the gospel.

Christ is the perfect and true revelation of God. He is eternal, and co-existent with the Father and the Spirit. Christ took on humanity, and laid aside His divine prerogative. He never ceased to be God, but took on the form of a man so that He could bear the penalty for our sin and be the sacrifice needed to satisfy the righteous requirements of God on our behalf. He is fully man and fully God. The very core of the gospel is Christ's redemptive work; that Christ died to redeem the elect of God. Through His death, Christ paid the penalty for sin, not His own, for He was sinless, but the sins of all those who put their full faith and trust in Him. His death satisfied the righteous requirements of the law. He bore the full wrath of God on behalf of guilty sinners. In His death, Christ took the place of sinners. Their sin was imputed to Christ, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to them. II Cor 5:21 sums this up well: <sup>21</sup> *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*; Finally, the Scripture asserts that Christ is coming back, and when He returns He will judge every man according to his works and eventually fully restore the heavens and earth and visibly rule as King of kings and Lord of lords. The ultimate good news is that Christ will reign over a restored creation.

The fifth essential aspect is that in light of what Christ has done to rescue sinners, there is an appropriate response. The gospel calls every sinner to forsake his sin and to trust Christ for mercy and forgiveness. The gospel commands every man to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are here today, and God has opened your eyes to see this wonderful Savior, and to see yourself and your desperate need, I implore you to call on Him today, and beg for His mercy. I call you to come as you are, offering no excuse or self righteousness, and surrender everything to Him. If you will do that in simple, childlike faith, He promises that He will forgive you, and will save you from your sins.

That is the appropriate response if you see that you are lost and need to be saved. There is also an appropriate response to the gospel for believers.

First, we need to know the gospel through and through. We need to study it, meditate on it, consider it, and commit to learning all we can about it. This is call to every member of this church to make a diligent study of the gospel. Second, we need to submit our lives to the power of the gospel. What Jesus Christ accomplished at the cross not only delivers us from the penalty of sin, but also from the power of sin. We need to call on Christ every day for His help based on what He accomplished on the cross. Beloved, if you a struggling with sin, the gospel alone has the power to break that chain. It is unacceptable for you as a child of God to walk around defeated and overtaken in sin. You can walk in victory over sin if you will submit to the gospel. Third, we always need to be ready to explain the gospel to others. This includes our spouses, children, grandchildren, workmates, friends and neighbors. It also means that whenever we have an opportunity to lead singing, or teach the Bible, that we always make the gospel message primary and central. Fourth, we need to be ready to defend the gospel by being discerning and courageously rejecting false gospels. This may mean lovingly confronting those who are in error and helping them understand the truth. Finally, we need to have a passion for taking this good news known around the world to every person.

So that brings me back to our 6 common gospels. Listen and evaluate again whether or not they are true or false:

**#1 The good news is that God is the Father of every human being and reaches out in many ways to mankind.** This one is just wrong. The true gospel is exclusive, through Christ alone.

**#2 The good news is that we can transform society by bringing our Christian values to the culture.** Though this is an effect of the gospel, that God's people are salt and light, this is not the gospel. The good news is about the work of Christ, not the work of His people.

**#3 The good news is that God loves everybody and wants to answer their prayers.** Many people pray in vain. Only those who are redeemed by Christ's work at Calvary have an audience with God the Father. Prayers without redemption is futile and vain religion.

**#4 The good news is that God is merciful and forgiving.** This gospel is deficient and leaves people thinking that God will just look the other way concerning their sin because He is nice. Again, the gospel proclaims the foundation for God's mercy, and also expounds God's holiness and hatred of sin.

**#5 The good news is that all people are God's children, made in his image, and therefore are good.** Again, it is the goodness of Christ that is the gospel. This error ignores the fall and depravity of man.

**#6 The good news is that if I pray and ask Jesus to come into my heart, then I can be saved.** This one is the most insidious, because it is so popular. Salvation is based in what Christ has done, not what I do. Many people are trusting in a deficient gospel and have placed their hope in their own emotional experience and choices. If you are truly saved today, it is because God has saved you, not because you have done anything.

I want to finish this message with a story about the power of the true gospel. Sallie had been married about a year. Right after she was first married, her husband took a job in a metropolitan area, and they moved away from southern Ohio to this large city. Sallie did not respond well to living in a small apartment in an urban area. Even worse, her husband did not respond well to her anxiety and concerns. Add to the situation a pregnancy,

and a baby. Sallie was alone in a large city, not handling it well, with a new baby and a husband who could not relate to her stress. Eventually, Sallie left the city and moved back to her parent's home. Her husband loved her, but felt he had to remain at his job, so they were separated. He would visit on weekends, but the long range relationship was strained at best and fast deteriorating. Sallie's emotional state continued to decline. In fact, she had seriously contemplated suicide. Our friends knew that I had been doing some counseling here at our church, and asked if Connie and I would consider talking with her. We graciously agreed, and bought a cute baby outfit and headed to our friend's home.

Connie and I met Sallie. We held the baby and chatted and expressed our concern. Her husband was there, and we also met him. After a friendly but brief visit, we left, and prayed, and asked the Lord to open the door according to His time and will. A few days later, our friends called and said that Sallie had been to see a Christian psychiatrist, and had found little hope. She wanted to talk to us.

We returned to our friend's home and listened to Sallie describe the blackness and deep darkness of her depression. She spoke of how she felt so unclean, unworthy, and guilty. She said that even when she did good things such as acts of kindness, she felt like it was for selfish reasons. She felt overwhelmed and trapped by the situation with her husband, and shackled by chains of mourning and sadness. Other counselors and friends had encouraged her to pray, and to try to look on the bright side. The Christian psychiatrist explained that her depression was an illness and prescribed some medication in an attempt to alleviate the depression.

After expressing some empathy and concern for the situation, I told Sallie that her feelings and perception about herself were legitimate. I explained from the Scriptures the awfulness of sin and its consequences, and told her that what she was feeling was the judgment of God in her life for her sin. I explained that all of life's problems are based in our depravity and alienation from God. At this point, many would say "How unfeeling and cruel, to agree with such talk. Sallie needed someone to understand and comfort her, and help heal her damaged self esteem. She needed assurance that she was not that bad, and that God accepts her as she is." I want you to consider her response. After some thought, Sallie replied and stated that we were the first people that took her condition seriously and seemed to understand its severity. She seemed relieved that finally someone understood the magnitude and depth of her problem. For the first time, Sallie had hope. She reasoned that if the Word of God provided a right diagnosis and description of her problem, maybe it had the solution. You can guess what happened next. We shared the wonderful gospel of Jesus Christ. We told her that although she was guilty, unworthy and under the condemnation of God, that Christ had come to die for guilty and unworthy sinners. He bore that awful darkness and blackness and judgment of God on the cross, so that we might be set free from our selfishness and live to glorify the God. Sallie said she would take these words to heart, and start to read the Bible.

I talked to Sallie's mother about a week later. The Lord had opened Sallie's heart and granted her faith and repentance. Previously, Sallie had been trusting in her parent's faith, and through this situation she had come to realize her own desperate need for a personal relationship with Christ. This is not the end of the story. Sallie's husband saw the change. Though was a professed agnostic, within the next year he also understood the gospel and received Christ as His Savior. They now have two young children and are serving the Lord in a local church.