



## **The Gospel of Grace & Peace**

Jonathan K. Dodson | Gal 1:1-10 | September 8, 2019

After a few weeks off from preaching, it's great to be back. I'm very excited about where we're going this Fall. We're offering three City Seminary courses. Ever get stuck and don't know what to say to a family member, friend, CG, when they voice fear, anger, depression? *Counseling One Another*. This class is for you. Will help you be a person of hope and grace. Do you want to be a good parent? Then you need a great marriage. Want more love and respect in relationship? Robie and I and several marriage mentors would love to help you in *Renewing Marriage*. And on Wednesdays, *Women of the Word*. We need women of the Word in times like these. Sign up ASAP. Our culture is experiencing significant change. Historian Philip Jenkins has noted the speed and scale of change in the last two decades is unprecedented in US history: technology, government, morality, religion. Thirteen years ago, when I moved to Austin people asked me about the reliability of the Bible, the exclusivity of Jesus; now the questions are more about racial justice, sexuality, politics. Our society is in the throes of seismic change. Some are leaving the faith. Over the next the next six months we'll address these issues. But before we do, it's important to recognize possessing answers to cultural questions isn't enough to weather the change. For that, we need roots that go deep, give us strength, backbone, conviction. We need to be regrounded in the gospel. Paul's letter to the Galatians does that. I'll introduce the letter by taking the first ten verses in reverse. We'll look at the *Deserting the Gospel, the Doctrine of the Gospel, Defense of the Gospel*.

### **Deserting the Gospel**

Paul wrote this letter to a collection of churches he and Barnabas founded in modern day Turkey, Galatia. Many of the cities they visited were shaped by the “new Rome” ethos which pledged allegiance to Caesar as king. Paul comes along and tells these cities about *another*, messianic, king who died and rose to forgive sin and usher in a new age. It flies in the face of 1st century politics and religion: the Romans honored no king but Caesar; the Jews pined for a politician-messiah to rival him. Paul preaches Christ crucified. He challenges their deeply held beliefs, and in a city called Pisidian Antioch, they stone him and leave him for dead. Now none of us have endured a stoning, but digital and verbal stones fly every day. If you’re living in a glass house, your fragile faith will shatter. You’ll be blown by the wind. If you choose to live in a fortress of self-righteousness, you become the stone-thrower, shattering others. Paul writes to say it’s urgent to live, not in a glass house or a walled fortress, but in Christ. Not in anger or fear but in grace and peace. He returns home from Galatia to discover the churches he started are abandoning Christ. So writes them, “**I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in his grace**” (6). He doesn’t ignore their desertion. He addresses it with intensity: *who has bewitched you, who’s troubling you, let them be accursed!* Is he overreacting? Hyperbole? When a plane is grounded, the pilot goes through the whole spiel about what to do in the event of turbulence: air, belts, doors, but when the plane hits the real pocket of turbulence he blurts out—*take your seats; put your seatbelts on!* He doesn’t bother with niceties. Walking away from grace is *turbulence* that warrants warning. They’re in danger wrecking of their faith and Paul loves them enough to warn them. Do you? Why should we warn others? The Galatians were following influential teachers embracing what Paul calls a **distorted** gospel. The word means to

*cause a change in the state or condition.* It's messing with the fundamental nature of a thing. When we hear about gene editing, we don't have to grasp all the science to know it's wrong, don't mess with reality. If a friend is diagnosed with cancer, but they insist it's just a cold. Should you let them go with their diagnosis? Tolerate their delusion? No, you insist they see things as they are—you've got to wake up to reality; you have cancer! If you don't, you could die. It's possible to be so devoted to a thing, so absorbed with a self-diagnosis, that we distort the nature of the gospel. Some Christians are so absorbed with their self-diagnosis they're tampering with fundamental nature of the gospel. It's called *deconstructing the faith*. It's a term borrowed from pomo philosophy but used to refer to taking apart historic Christianity, the Christianity represented here, and reassembling it without its core to suit personal opinion. *Distorting* the gospel draws people away from grace. Now people aren't drawn away thinking, "I want to desert grace." They actually *think* they're leaving for *more grace*, to affirm others' views on sex, gender, truth, politics. But Paul makes it clear that to move away from the gospel is to move away from grace. And to move away from grace is to move away from Christ. You can't elevate a personal view above Jesus' teaching without at the same time subordinating Jesus to yourself. You're saying I know better, you got the good news wrong. It's downgrading Jesus. Paul says quite passionately, *if we or an angel from heaven preaches another gospel he is to be accursed.* Paul saying if we try reshape Christ, his teaching, and Scripture—we are preaching another gospel. That is to be accursed. Christians: we are responsible to warn one another. Paul says in Galatians 6 *if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness"* (6:1). By this he means those who have the Spirit, if I can talk frankly with you for a

moment, how should we go about doing this? 3 Ways to restore a brother or sister.

- 1) Confront with humility and gentleness. Keep watch on yourself less you are tempted, to what? Tempted to self-righteousness. *I can't believe so and so*. Tempted to elevate culture over Scripture. Maybe their right?
- 2) Ask which is louder: the voice of culture or Scripture. Always ask which Scriptures support their view. We're entitled to our own opinions but not to our own Bibles.
- 3) Ask if they find themselves agreeing with God more or less. The more we mature the more we will, not only agree with God but see his way as *best*.

Now why does he say if an angel were to preach to them? Does he expect angels to step into the pulpit? No, he's saying it doesn't matter how important, how influential, how charismatic, how many followers they have—if they are distorting the gospel they're judged by Scripture as accursed. *Popularity does not equal credibility*. In fact, it's quite the opposite. The more faithful we are to Christ, the less popular we will become, “[For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ](#)” (10). Question you have to ask yourself: Am I seeking to please others or seeking to serve Christ?

## **Doctrine of the Gospel**

What exactly are we talking about? Why does Paul insist if we mess with the gospel we move away from grace? Isn't that harsh? “[Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age](#) (3–4). There's a relationship between grace and peace and the Father and the Son. He's saying grace and peace don't come from people, preachers, or communities. The real deal is copyrighted by

the Father, Son and Spirit. Now, some look at Jesus death and say isn't that the picture of humility? Isn't that gracious? It is, but its much more: it's deeper and broader than exemplary humility. Deeper: Jesus died to forgive **sin** (grace). Broader: He rose to deliver us from this present evil age (peace). Take a deeper look. **Grace** by its very nature assumes a need, a defect, a void. If you're late on a bill, you can receive a grace period. Why? Because you need more time to pay it. You failed to meet the deadline. Grace recognizes a failure, a need. If we were perfect, in our natures and in our perspectives, we wouldn't need grace. But our feelings, thoughts, actions are defective, shot through with need for grace. God calls this *sin*. Notice verse 3 says [he gave himself for our sins](#). Grace for sins, but not just grace. He gave **himself** for our sins. The Greek word "for" actually means *in the place of*. Jesus is saying, your cancer, your sin, is so bad it needs more than a grace period. It needs grace incarnate. You're terminal—and it's your life or mine. Look again: [He gave himself for our sins](#). He did not give money, time, or angels. He gave *himself*. Now, if he could get us grace and peace any other way, don't you think he would have done it? Avoided the trauma of the cross? He gave himself because *the only way* to obtain grace, forgiveness of our sin *is for Christ to die on our behalf*. And the only way to enjoy it is to get in line with that reality. To admit our sins, to recognize grace and peace are copyrighted by God. Then take it to the bank and cash it in. It's popular in church communities to say I struggle with that. And others pitch in and say me too, and then everyone sighs in collective relief. We all struggle. That's like holding 100,000 check, standing in front of the bank and saying, I really struggle financially. I could use some help, and then not cashing the check. Go to the bank. Confess your specific sins to Christ. Ask him for grace in specific amounts. What do you need to be forgiven for?

Feel the pinch and the relief of Christ-purchased grace! The gospel is deeper than we think. Now broader: **peace** to deliver us from **evil**. Notice he doesn't say to deliver us from bad doctrine, bad decisions but from *this present evil age*. What's he saying? There's this concept in the NT of two ages that exist side by side: the age of evil and the age of the messiah, of grace. Think of our world ensconced by a dome of evil. The prince of the power of air rules over it. It is governed by the elementary principles and powers. This is why there is systemic injustice: racism, poverty, sexual assault. We're conceived in a system, under a dome in which we breathe evil in and out. Now, when Jesus descended into our world he hatched a rebellion of good inside the dome. His death and resurrection launch a new creation. And those who trust him are delivered not only from their sins but also from the evil age, and all its ills. We will see in Galatians, this rebellion for good touches the poor, minorities, communities, ethics, culture. It radiates transforming doctrine, decisions, actions. When Jesus died and rose it was like hitting an EMP that emits grace for our *deepest* need—forgiveness of sins/union with Christ—and peace our *broadest* needs—deliverance from injustice and systemic evil. Luther, “**By His resurrection Christ won the victory over law, sin, flesh, world, devil, death, hell, and every evil. And this His victory He donated unto us.**” Now that is grace and peace: deeper, broader.

### **Defending the Gospel**

Now, why believe this? But why believe *Paul*? Isn't he just a man? He opens his letter in defense of his apostleship. An **apostle** was a person who witnessed the risen Christ and was chosen by him, **And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles** (Lk 6:13). In

Acts 9, Paul is added to this group when he meets the risen Christ on a road to Damascus. Jesus tells him he's been chosen to bear the gospel. He got it firsthand. *This* is why we should believe him. He comes on divine authority, not his own authority. He didn't invent the doctrines; he didn't read a few blogs and change his view on Judaism. His message is not from man nor through man but [through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead](#) (1). This means in trusting Paul, we're trusting God—the God who raised Jesus from the dead. If you want to hike Everest, you need a map, a guide, a sherpa. And to get that, you have to rely on someone else, an expert, an authority on the mountain. Otherwise, you'll get lost. Paul is saying, I know the Authority; he made me an expert, gave me the map. We'd be foolish not to follow him. He's showing us how to not get lost, how to be people who don't desert the gospel but defend, deliver, and delight in the gospel of Jesus. Grace and peace hang on it. Individual and systemic evil are toppled by it. Let's contend for belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ.