

“Tough Words”
Galatians 1:6-10

Introduction:

1. Suppose you turn on the television this afternoon to watch a football game, and it’s just about time for the kick-off. But before the game begins, the referee announces that all games will be planned with a new rule. Neither team is allowed to offend the other or do anything that would hinder the operations of the other. The defense will politely refrain from doing nasty things like tackling and attempting to take the ball away, and the offense will also politely refrain from blocking or trying to score. Both teams will show the utmost respect and admiration for each other. Certainly, that would be silly and not worth watching for a moment.

2. Sadly, talking about religion is supposed to be carried on with those kinds of ridiculous rules. Now I’m not talking about treating people according to the second greatest commandment and respect for others as God’s image bearers. No, I’m talking about the nonsensical attitude that doesn’t want anyone to be “offended” in anyway. The Creator, the living God, has no such attitude. The truth of the story of his glory in Jesus Christ is essential, and he expects us to proclaim it and stand up for it.

3. The apostle Paul knew the surpassing value of the good news of Jesus, because he had experienced Christ’s saving power in it. He was convinced that it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. He knew the change that God had worked in him, and now he was ready to die for the good news. We must remember the value of the gospel when we read this section of the letter.

Exposition:

I. The mood of the apostle

A. Paul is amazed or astonished about what has happened to them. He had preached the gospel of Christ to them with much suffering on his part, but he had the joy of seeing a number of gatherings of believers start. They seemed that they would continue to grow and be faithful to the gospel. But now there were serious problems. They were turning away from the gospel. “How could this happen?”

1. There are times that Christians are surprised at what other Christians do. If you have been so surprised, you are in good company. Even an apostle was amazed at what the Galatians were doing. Have you ever heard someone say, “I thought so and so was a Christian, but he or she did _____.” Too many times, those shocked by such inconsistent behavior have sat in judgment on the offenders and written them off. There is a better way. When Paul was troubled by the Galatians, he communicated with them. We should seek restoration rather than judgment. Paul writes this letter to promote beliefs and practices in agreement with the gospel.

2. Notice how the reality of the situation fully engages Paul’s whole being. He is not writing dispassionately or with disinterest. His mind is wrapped up in their departure from grace. He

speaks with emotion and seeks to persuade them to return to God. He knows that they ought to be fully committed to Christ, but he is disturbed to find that they are wavering. So he must speak.

Comment: Observe that the early Christians were not some august assembly of super-saints. Far from it! They, like all Christians, could have serious spiritual problems. The early Christians battled a number of errors. They did not have a pristine belief and worship system. This is very important to understand. Only those with a defective methodology look to the early church as possessing a superior way of worship and spirituality to what we have today. Whatever they—or we—say and do is only valid and worthy of imitation if it agrees with the Scriptures!

B. Paul is put into this mood for two reasons.

1. Concern for the glory of Christ – God sent his Son to die in order to set people free from sin, condemnation, and death. To suggest that salvation depends on doing what the law covenant required robs Christ of his glory.

2. Concern for the spiritual life and welfare of people – There is only one way to be right before God—by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. To draw people away from this great reality pushes them toward eternal punishment in hell.

Apply: What is your hope when you stand in the presence of God?

II. The cause of the trouble

A. By the Galatians—their desertion of God

1. Paul gets all the smoke out of the room and points out that they were deserting God. He tells them that they were changing sides—leaving God’s side for the enemy. The Greek word “signifies ‘to transfer one’s allegiance’. It is used of soldiers in the army who revolt or desert, and of men who change sides in politics and philosophy” (Stott). Though it might have surprised the Galatians, Paul solemnly states that they were deserting God. Though still incredibly religious, they were walking away from God. How can this be? They were abandoning the gospel of Christ.

Apply: People may think they are zealous for God, but if they reject his truth, they lack love for God. This would startle those who were champions for the way of life taught by the law covenant.

2. Their desertion is more blameworthy because they were in the process of deserting him who called them by grace of Christ. The word “call” refers to God’s saving initiative in salvation. We’ll talk more about this at verse fifteen. And they were exchanging grace for the works of the law.

3. It is surprising that this decline happened so quickly. To do quick flip-flops shows an attitude that lacks commitment. Had they really been convinced of the glory of Christ in the gospel?

Apply: Do you delight in the good news of Jesus? Or are you hoping for a better offer? Ask yourself how valuable Christ and the gospel are to you? Is the Lord worth more than the world?

B. By the message twisters – Paul had God-given wisdom to know the source of their defection. Others were throwing them into confusion.

1. The horrid message that was proclaimed. It was a “different” gospel; that is, it wasn’t good news at all! Paul cannot stomach even referring to it a gospel without immediately disowning such an idea. In fact, the message the trouble makers was spreading was a perversion. You cannot modify the message of salvation in Christ through his death and resurrection without perverting.

2. The confusion that was caused. Instead of bringing peace, the false message produced trouble, doubt, lack of harmony, and unrest. As Paul will make clear, through the gospel the Spirit of God produces love, joy, peace, etc.

Quote: The false teachers “harassed the minds of the disciples individually by filling them with doubts and alarms as to the safety of their state while they remained uncircumcised and unsubjected to the Mosaic law; and they troubled them as a body, laying the foundations of schism and division” (Brown).

Apply: Every gathering of believers must remain fully loyal to Christ and his good news. This is part of God’s pathway to practical peace.

III. The curse on those perverting the good news

A. The nature of the curse

1. Anathema means to be under the curse of God (cf. 1 Cor 16:22; Rm 9:3). It means to be subject to eternal punishment in hell.

2. The repetition shows the seriousness of the matter. Paul is writing deliberately and forcefully. He intends to shake them awake, like happens when someone is in a deep slumber and danger is near.

B. The importance of God’s message over the messenger

1. This is shown by his lack of self-interest. Paul even called the curse of God on himself, if he would twist the gospel. This shows he had no personal ax to grind.

2. This is shown by a hypothetical case. None of the holy angels of God would ever twist the good news of Jesus. Paul knows that! But if anyone did, he would be eternally condemned.

3. He knows that the most important requirement in any messenger is to be faithful to God—to please God. “There are just two choices on the shelf—pleasing God or pleasing self” (Collier).

Lessons:

1. Let us remember why Paul is so concerned. God’s glory and the eternal destiny of people are at stake. Christianity is not a religious game for the bored. The God who is in charge of everything deeply cares about how people handle the good news of his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you share his attitude?

2. The substance of the gospel is the grace of Christ. Beware of anyone or any teaching that lessens your need for Christ or his grace.

3. There is only one gospel, only one way of salvation (Jn 14:6; Ac 4:12).

4. Don't be dazzled by personal charm, speaking gifts (like voice quality, clever phrases, interesting stories, and good jokes), or the academic/social achievements of any minister. Does he preach salvation by grace alone through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ alone?

- Dave Frampton