

**NOTHING ELSE LIKE IT**  
**Galatians 1:6-24**

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“Do you really think there is only one way to heaven?” Kate asked as she reached for a cup of black coffee.

“Well, that’s what they teach at my church,” Debbie replied. Kate and Debbie were enjoying a treasured moment of peace and quiet in the teacher’s lounge at Carver Elementary. Today was the dreaded day to begin giving the standardized test, and the tension level was escalating among the teachers.

“But that seems so narrow, so old-fashioned, so much like my mother! To tell you the truth, Debbie, you are beginning to sound like a bigot!” Kate retorted. Kate felt she was close enough to Debbie to be frank about her feelings, and she never was one to carefully measure her words. “I mean, if you believe in God, follow your heart, do your best, and treat others with kindness, that’s what really matters,” she continued.

“But Jesus claimed to be the only way to His Father; I’m sure that’s in the Bible somewhere,” Debbie mumbled with guarded enthusiasm.

“No doubt Jesus was probably the best example ever of sacrifice, love and selflessness, but how can the whole world’s destiny be carried on the shoulders of one great person? What about Gandhi or Mother Teresa? God allows us all to follow our own truth. Debbie, everyone has to be true to her own heart. Sharon is a Mormon, you are a Baptist, and I’m...well, I’m interested in being at one with the earth, God’s creation. But who’s to say you’re right and I’m wrong?” Kate lectured. She had unknowingly slipped into the “teacher tone” that she used to scold her third grade students.

As the bell rang, Debbie replied, “Oh, it’s time to get back to class, time to pass out those tests. Good luck!”

“You too,” Kate responded.

Debbie was relieved to end that conversation! She was a little unsure of herself now and afraid of making Kate feel uncomfortable. She picked up her blue and gold Carver Cadets canvas tote bag and made her way down to the classroom. “Jesus is the only way...I think? Am I being too narrow, too old-fashioned?” she thought to herself as she entered a classroom full of 21 nervous third graders.

“Take out your No. 2 pencils and clear your desks,” Debbie ordered, as she opened the packet of tests.

Every American Christian will eventually face Debbie’s dilemma. At school, in the community, and in the workplace, Christians are feeling society’s pressure to accept all expressions of faith as equally valid. A “20/20” news program addressed Baptist efforts to lead members of other religions to Christ. Concerning Baptist evangelism, a woman in the news program commented, “This kind of religious exclusivity just doesn’t belong in today’s society anymore.” Society will increasingly label Christians as narrow-minded and exclusive because of their claim that there is only one gospel, only one story that deserves our faith and devotion.

Attempts to add to the gospel of the apostles, however, is nothing new. Paul, in the book of Galatians, faced just such an attempt by Jewish Christians, Judaizers, who were trying to add Jewish tradition, circumcision, dietary restrictions, and law-keeping to faith in Christ as necessary for salvation. In our first sermon, we see how vehemently Paul opposed attempts to change the gospel, God’s story of salvation.

### **Nothing Else Like It (1:6-7)**

The book of Galatians is Paul’s only letter that does not include a thanksgiving to God for his readers. For example, in Philippians 1:3, Paul writes, “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all, in view of your participation in the gospel from the first day until now” (NASB). In Galatians, however, Paul has no thanksgiving for his readers, nor any mention of their progress in the faith.

After Paul had left these churches, some Jewish Christians perverted the gospel, claiming that their Gentile brethren not only had to believe in the story of Christ, but also had to keep the Jewish law. They had to be circumcised. They had to follow dietary restrictions.

Paul was angry because he was being opposed by these false teachers in the Galatian churches. They had successfully persuaded some of Paul’s converts to accept a gospel different from the gospel of grace that Paul had proclaimed. Some of the Galatians were convinced that the Judaizers’ false gospel was the true gospel. Paul countered that there is only one good news story—the story of God’s grace. God offers salvation to those who follow His crucified and resurrected Son, Christ Jesus. Paul had declared that faith alone leads to salvation. The apostles, including Paul, preached a gospel that called for the listeners to proclaim Jesus as Lord, leading to repentance and a life of obedience.

Paul was amazed. He could hardly believe that the Galatians had so quickly deserted the real good news story for a so-called “different gospel.” Paul found it disturbing that they left the good news story about God’s grace, about a Messiah who died an undeserved death in their place, a story that ends in the glorious resurrection, ascension, and enthronement of Christ. In defense, Paul made it clear that there is only one good news story. There is nothing else like it.

We, too, live in a culture full of false teachers who manipulate and corrupt God’s gospel of grace. We, too, can easily be led away from the true gospel. Too many families choose churches not

based upon doctrine, that is what is taught about God, but rather upon how the church's programs might entertain their children. Pastors are not often asked, "What does your church teach as the truth of God, the gospel?"

The most important questions for Christians continue to be: "What story does the church tell? What gospel does it preach? What is the truth of God to which a particular church clings?"

We live in a society that demands options. Today, you can choose from 40 types of Tylenol and 60 types of Kleenex. Many modern minds are offended to hear that Paul said that there is no other way, that there is only one good news story that leads to a real relationship with the God of creation.

People are forever trying to add to the gospel story. Like Judaizers in Paul's day who tried to add Jewish tradition to the gospel, Muslims have tried to add the chapter of Mohammed and the Book of Koran, and Mormons have tried to add Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. We, too, must join Paul's passion by asserting that there is but one good news story, one gospel of God to which no one can add. There is nothing else like it!

### **The Message More than the Messenger (1:8-10)**

Paul was emphatic that there can be no additions or deletions to the gospel as preached by the apostles, the closest followers of Jesus. Thus, he asserted that whether it be himself, his missionary companions, or even an angel from heaven, no one is to be accepted if they preach a gospel contrary to the good news story of God's grace. He declared, moreover, that anyone who preaches a distorted gospel should be accursed.

Paul was so angry (v. 9) that he practically repeats what he has said in the previous verse (v. 8). "I've said it before, and I'll say it again," he declares emphatically. "If any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed."

What did Peter, Paul, and the other apostles preach? When we read their sermons in Acts, we can summarize their gospel into basic beliefs:

1. God is at work for our salvation in the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.
2. Following His resurrection, Jesus took His rightful place as the enthroned Lord who sits at God's right hand.
3. Jesus poured forth His spirit upon all His followers.
4. Those who respond to the gospel, declaring the Lordship of Jesus with humility and repentance, will find salvation.
5. The followers of Jesus are, indeed, the real people of God – both Jew and Gentile – make up the church.
6. Jesus is coming again for His followers.

7. God's whole plan of salvation, the story of Jesus, had been foretold by the Jewish prophets – Jesus' story is Israel's story.

While the apostles certainly said more than this in their sermons, these seven points summarize their basic beliefs, the heart of the gospel they preached.

Sometimes we are fooled by polished messengers. Like Paul's world, our world is full of false teachers ready to lead us astray. Like the persuasive Judaizers, contemporary false teachers entice new believers away from the historic gospel. Often, though not always, false teachers are found preaching on the radio or television, emphasizing and distorting the scripture, making major that which is minor.

### **Paul's Gospel as a Gift from God (1:11-24)**

So far in this chapter, Paul had made clear that there is only one good news story and that the message is more important than the messenger. Next he described how he received his gospel from the resurrected Christ, Himself.

Paul offered his own autobiography, his story of an encounter with a resurrected Christ (cf. Acts 9), to authenticate his gospel. Some in the Galatian churches were saying that Paul was not a real apostle. They were asserting that, unlike the pillar apostles of Jerusalem, he was a renegade. They believed that while Paul had originally received his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles, he later deserted their teaching for his own version. In order to defend his gospel, Paul must defend his own apostleship. He answered two important questions: who made him an apostle? and where did he get his gospel?

Paul, himself, was a zealous Pharisee (cf. Phil. 3:1-6). No one thought keeping the law was more important than he did. He, however, had an encounter with the resurrected Christ while he was on the road to Damascus to persecute the people of God (Acts 9). His call to become an apostle was not a work of his own doing. Rather, it was completely God's grace.

Paul wanted to be perfectly clear both that his apostleship comes from God, and that his gospel comes through "a revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:12). To say that Paul's gospel was a revelation of Jesus Christ means that it was taught to him by Christ and also that it was centered upon Christ and what Christ had accomplished through his death and resurrection. Paul recounted his trips to Jerusalem to emphasize that he did not have a human teacher. Rather, his teacher was none other than the crucified and resurrected Christ. From the very beginning, Paul had been independent from the believers in Jerusalem.

He wanted it to be understood that his apostleship is on par, in many ways, with the apostleship of the Jerusalem pillars, including Peter and James. Rather than quickly embracing Paul and delivering the gospel to him, the Jerusalem church continued in suspicion before finally glorifying God because of his conversion. It was Barnabas who finally extended the hand of fellowship to Paul. (See Acts 9:26-27). Paul's miraculous change from persecutor to preacher was a success story of God's grace reaching out to those in bondage to the law. He surely did not want the Galatian Christians to embrace the very bondage he had escaped.

## Back to the Teacher's Lounge

... Debbie spent the next few weeks strengthening her own faith, her own understanding of being a disciple, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Having clarified her own faith through a re-examination of the gospel, she now felt comfortable carrying on a conversation with Kate. She wanted to be loving, yet she would not allow Kate to intimidate her or make her feel ashamed of following the gospel of the New Testament.

“Are you anxious about getting back the test results?” Debbie asked Kate as they enjoyed another moment of tranquility in the teacher's lounge.

“Not really,” said Kate. “My students have been really progressing this year. I'm sure that yours did just fine, too.”

“Kate, I'm really sorry that sometimes you think that I sound too old fashioned, too much ‘like your mother,’ as you put it, when it comes to talking about my faith. But, I must tell you that I believe the New Testament teaches that the only way to have a real relationship with God is through believing in His crucified and resurrected Son. Kate, I really don't think that I'm better than anyone else, but I have found the answer of God's grace and am determined to share it with others because I care for them.”

“Do you really think Jesus was that important?” Kate inquired with a hint of protest in her voice.

“I really do. He was God's unique Son. The prophets foretold His birth; He lived a perfect life and died a death that substituted for my death and your death. Thus, He paid for our sins on the cross. From the historic witnesses, we know that He was in the tomb for a short while and then experienced a miraculous resurrection—a resurrection that means that those who believe in Him will also defeat death.”

Kate, who normally did all the talking, listened carefully to Debbie as she spoke with a new boldness and confidence.

“Kate, I must tell you that I have experienced the presence of Christ in my life, the presence of His Spirit. He convicts me of my sin, brings me joy even in the midst of sorrow, and brings meaning to my life. Christ offers me purpose for living and allows me to forgive others, even as He has forgiven me.”

“I don't know, Debbie,” Kate replied, but by now she was doubting herself. “It's just that I can't be as sure as you are. I really wish I could. I wish that I had your faith, but I don't.”

“Kate, I hope you understand when I say that Jesus is the only way that I'm not trying to be closed-minded, nor am I trying to demean others or their way of life. But now that I have found the forgiving grace of God, it would be unthinkable for me to keep the joy to myself.

“I’m praying for you, Kate, that God will open your eyes, too, and you will feel His love and understand His plan and His desire to have a relationship with you.”

“Sometimes you really do seem to have a lot of peace in your life, even when things go crazy,” Kate thought aloud.

“He is my peace, Kate.”

“Time to pass out the test results,” Kate said, managing to change the subject. “Good luck.”

“Good luck to you, too, Kate,” Debbie said. “And thanks for listening.”