

The Gospel According to Jesus
Death By Religion, Part 3
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2/07/10

Key Scripture: Galatians 1:11-2:10

Introduction:

The central issue in the book of Galatians is justification; how we are made right with God. Paul says we are justified (made right with God) by faith alone, through grace alone, in Christ alone. It's not because of anything we do or don't do, but only because of what Jesus has done, both in living a perfect life in our place and dying in our place. Martin Luther said that this doctrine of being made right through God's grace in Christ alone is slippery in us. There are two ditches that people fall into: lawlessness and legalism.

1. Lawlessness is casting off all restraints. If it feels good, do it. I'm my own authority.
 2. Legalism (or religion) is basing our relationship with God on our own performance. It is meeting some standard that we set for ourselves or others set for us. As long as you live up to the standard, you can feel good about yourself and feel that God is pleased with you; you can worship, you feel close to God. If you don't measure up, you feel that you are far from God, and find yourself buried in guilt and shame.
 3. We also measure others by the same standards. If they don't measure up, we feel better about ourselves. "At least I'm doing better than that guy."
 4. Living the Cross-Centered Life by C. J. Mahaney "Here's what legalism says to God, 'Your plan didn't work. The cross wasn't enough and I need to add my good works to it to be saved. Legalism is (1) Self-atonement for the purpose of (2) Self-glorification and ultimately for (3) Self-worship. If we are made right with God through our own good works, then we merit praise, honor and glory, rather than drawing attention to what Jesus has done for us on the cross and to the good news of the gospel of grace. It says God owes me. It puts Him in our debt."
 5. Legalism is a "Jesus plus" gospel, the belief that it is Jesus plus my good works that makes me okay with God. So what's the cure for legalism? The gospel of grace.
 6. The Christians in Galatians were falling for a "Jesus Plus" gospel. Paul is writing them to remind them of the true gospel of God's grace through Jesus. The Judaizers were saying that Paul wasn't a real apostle, that his message wasn't the real gospel; that he was leaving important things out. In this passage, Paul is defending his apostleship and his gospel.
- I. Paul's Gospel Comes From God, Not Man.
- A. Galatians 1:11- 12 - Paul had told the Galatians not to fall for another gospel. Now he tells us why, because his gospel isn't man's gospel. He didn't make it up. It's not the creation of man. It came to him as a revelation directly from Jesus.
 - B. Verses 13-14 - Paul had been a terrorist, a zealous Jew who persecuted followers of Jesus because they were threatening his religious way of life. He hated Jesus and made it his mission to destroy Christianity. (Acts 9:1)- Then he met Jesus. He

encountered the risen, glorified, stunning Jesus. For the first time he understood grace. Paul embraced the gospel and he was never the same.

- C. Man's gospel is always some form of man working his way to God. It is powerless to bring about real, lasting change in us. God's gospel is that God's grace reached down to man, providing everything for us when we had nothing to offer. This gospel of Jesus transforms, makes people new, gives joy and life, while religion just kills.

II. Paul's Apostleship To The Gentiles Is From God.

- A. Verse 15- Paul didn't choose to become a minister of the gospel. He had hated the gospel, but God had already marked Paul as His chosen vessel. That's grace. Paul, the Christ-hater, was loved and chosen by God even while he hated God and was in rebellion against him.
- B. Verse 16- Paul, a Pharisee, was called as a preacher to the Gentiles. Jews hated Gentiles. They were considered idolaters and unclean, and any association with them led to contamination of the Jews, and thus to separation from God. There were thousands of years of prejudice toward the Gentiles. It was a huge thing that God called Paul to preach the gospel of grace to the Gentiles. He was transformed by his encounter with Jesus. That's the power of the Gospel at work- turning a legalistic persecutor of Christians into their pastor!

III. Paul's Gospel: Jesus Alone

- A. Galatians 2:1-5 - After 14 years of ministry God told Paul to go to Jerusalem, where he had a conference with the other apostles to discuss the gospel that he was preaching. Titus, a Greek who was training for ministry, was with him. The Judaizers in Galatia had been teaching that the Gentile believers needed to be circumcised, but Paul didn't yield to them. He refused to force Titus to be circumcised, to make it clear that Jesus *plus nothing* saves you!
- B. Acts 16:3- Timothy, like Titus, is a Gentile who is not circumcised. This time Paul has Timothy get circumcised because they're traveling in areas with lots of Jews and they would not have access to preach the gospel otherwise. Paul was not compromising the gospel, but showing that circumcision means nothing and un-circumcision means nothing. They do not gain favor or right standing with God either way. It is not Jesus *plus circumcision* that saves you. In both cases Paul is working for the sake of the gospel, not legalism. It is his motivation that made all the difference.
- C. We have to be careful about judging someone based on what they do or don't do on the outside. Two people may do the same things, but for one it's legalism, while for the other one, it's not. (Example: praying and reading the Bible) The difference is their motivation. Doing things to earn favor, or to avoid guilt is legalism. Doing them to know and love Jesus more is not.
- D. 1 Tim. 4:7,10 and Titus 2:11-12 - Legalism is not the same thing as being disciplined or striving toward holiness. Grace is not opposed to effort. Grace trains us to renounce certain things, and to live self-controlled and Godly lives. That's not legalism, unless you begin to think you are earning God's love, because of it. Your right standing with God is all because of Jesus.

IV. Confirmation of Paul's Gospel

- A. Gal.2: 6-10 - The apostles in Jerusalem add nothing to Paul's gospel. They recognize the grace that God had given to him. They tell him to keep preaching the gospel to the Gentiles and they will teach the same gospel to the Jews. It is one gospel, the only gospel. It is justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Gentiles don't have to keep the law or be circumcised. They just have to trust in Jesus. His perfect obedience gets credited to them. His death on the cross in our place saves us. The true gospel is: Jesus alone!
- B. "All the love and acceptance which perfect obedience could have obtained of God, belongs to you because Christ was perfectly obedient on your behalf."
Charles Spurgeon
- C. You don't have to live buried under guilt and shame. You don't have to live striving to make God accept you. You just have to cast yourself on Jesus. You don't have to do penance, work it off, try harder, or do better when you fail. You can simply say, "I have failed you- thank you for your cross!" Then run to Jesus!

V. The Gospel For the Poor

- A. Gal. 2:10- "Remember the poor." Famine had hit and the Jews were suffering. Paul was eager to help them as a sign of unity between Jewish and Gentile believers. The Jews were suffering, the Gentiles responded in love.
- B. When Jesus came, a central part of His mission was to proclaim the good news, the gospel, to the poor. And He calls His followers to love and care for the poor. Why? It's the heart of the Gospel. It is God's heart.
- C. We are all poor. We have nothing to commend us to God, nothing to earn His love or favor. We can't work hard enough or be good enough. We are spiritually poor. Bankrupt. Jesus makes this stunning statement, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 5:3) You can't become a Christian without becoming poor spiritually. Those who are blessed are those who recognize their poverty; who know that they have nothing to offer God; who know their only hope is Jesus. They are those who give up on their efforts at perfection and goodness, and trying to merit God's love and acceptance. They turn from the "*Jesus plus, pull yourself up by the bootstraps*" gospel, and cling to the gospel of God's free grace in Christ. When you begin to realize how Jesus loves us in our poverty and provides all that we're lacking, it catapults you into compassion for those who are poor and oppressed in this world. Because they're just like you. So you cry out to Jesus, you quit striving, and you receive free, unmerited, unearned, crazy, abundant grace of God. "I need Jesus!" That's the gospel.

Discussion Questions:

Why do you think God chose Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles?

What is the main difference between the gospel of grace and "man's" gospel?

What are some of the ways that Christians add to the gospel of "Jesus alone"?

Why is legalism (religion) powerless to bring real, lasting change in us?