

“No Other Gospel”

Galatians 1:1-9

The Book of Galatians is often called the *magna carte* of Christian liberty. There is perhaps no portion of Holy Scripture which packs the punch of Paul’s letter to the churches in Galatia. In this letter Paul sets out what is the most passionate defense of the gospel found in the whole of the New Testament. The apostle is angry when he writes this letter—so angry, in fact, that he calls the Galatians “foolish” (3:1). He even tells them if they want to begin with circumcision, they can go the whole way and emasculate themselves (5:12). What is it that has the apostle so upset?

The church to which Paul is writing is a congregation which he himself had helped to found not long before and which was now tolerating, if not embracing, a form of teaching that directly contradicted that which the apostle had previously taught them about the saving work of Jesus Christ. For Paul, this is a spiritual war to be fought over the meaning of the gospel. In this epistle, Paul is fighting for the very soul of these churches and he minces no words with those whom he regards as enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Before we work our way through this great letter, we should start by taking a look at the historical background which lead to its composition.

Paul’s circular letter to the churches in Galatia (a region located in what is now south-central Turkey) is likely his first epistle to be included in the New Testament and was written in AD 48, just prior to the Jerusalem Council described in Acts 15:1-21.¹ In Galatians 4:13, Paul refers to having preached the gospel to the Galatians previously. By looking at the events recounted in the Book of Acts, we know that Paul had visited the southern part of Galatia at least twice during the missionary journey described in Acts 14:21. In Galatians 2, Paul describes his visit to Jerusalem on the occasion of a great famine which hit the city as described in Acts 11:27-30.

All of this indicates that the Book of Galatians was written in the days preceding the Jerusalem Council, when the pressing question of Gentile conformity to the law of Moses was hotly debated before being definitively settled by the leaders of the church. This is powerful evidence that Galatians is Paul’s earliest letter which is included in the canon of the New Testament and that the doctrine of justification is the basic gospel message which Paul proclaimed from the very beginning of his ministry as apostle to the Gentiles.

As a result of Jewish opposition to Paul’s proclamation of Christ crucified in the synagogues, Paul and Barnabas instead turned to preaching to the Gentiles. Many were converted. But soon after Paul and Barnabas left the Galatian region, Jewish converts to Christianity began teaching in the churches that Gentile converts must likewise submit to the law of Moses and undergo circumcision, in order to be regarded as “right before God” (justified). In Galatians 1:7, Paul refers to certain individuals who were throwing the Galatians into confusion soon after he had left the region. These false teachers were

¹ For a helpful discussion of the issues surrounding the date and composition of this letter see: D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, An Introduction to the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), pp. 289-303; and F. F. Bruce, Paul: The Apostle of the Heart Set Free (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 173-187.

teaching that the gospel which Paul had proclaimed to them was dangerous, since it did not require obedience to the law as a condition of deliverance from the wrath of God. Known as Judaizers, these men did not believe that Jesus Christ's death and righteousness were sufficient to save sinners.

The Judaizers were undermining Paul's gospel by claiming that Paul's authority was inferior to that of the other apostles such as Peter and James, who were more closely associated with the Jerusalem Church and Judaism (1:1; 6:17). But the specific error they were spreading throughout the churches was that Gentile converts must live as Jews and undergo circumcision and submit to certain aspects of the ceremonial law, in order to be saved from the wrath to come in addition to embracing Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah.²

Apparently, no one among the Judaizers was flat out denying that a Christian must trust in the death of Christ in order to be delivered from the wrath of God which is to come. These false teachers were much more subtle than that. To their way of thinking, the death of Christ was necessary for salvation because it removed the guilt of past sin. But the Judaizers also believed that faith in Jesus Christ is not sufficient in and of itself to render one as "righteous" before God. Hence, one must add to faith in Christ as Messiah, the so-called "badges" or ethnic "emblems" of national Israel, namely submission to circumcision, the keeping of certain dietary laws, the celebration of Jewish feasts, and understanding continuing obedience to the law of Moses as essential in order to maintain one's place in the covenant community. This is what is known as covenantal nomism. Gentile converts were required to believe in Jesus but to live as Jews.³

In Galatians 4:10, Paul mentions that the false teachers were also instructing their converts to observe the feast days (4:10). As a result Paul says such people "want to be under law" (Galatians 4:21). The sad conclusion, says Paul, is that they are "trying to be justified by law." But this is an impossibility with eternal consequences.

This same group of false teachers is very likely represented at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1 ff) by those whom Luke says, "*came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.'*" In their misguided zeal to preserve the traditions of their fathers, these false teachers were raising a very serious challenge to the gospel through their insistence that Gentile converts must not only become followers of Jesus, as they had, but that Gentiles must also submit to ritual circumcision in order to be regarded as righteous before God.

Paul responds to these false teachers in Galatia with what can only be described as righteous indignation. The Epistle to the Galatians begins very abruptly, without the usual friendly greetings that characterize Paul's other epistles. In a rare flash of apostolic anger, Paul calls the Galatians "foolish" (3:1). He even informs them in Galatians 5:12 that if they start by adding circumcision to the perfect obedience of Christ, they might as well go the whole way and emasculate themselves, a very graphic expression of

² F. F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William. B. Eerdmans, 1982), 19-32.

³ James D. G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 77 ff.

self-mutilation in the original language.⁴

Paul's righteous anger stems from the fact that he himself had helped to found these churches by preaching Christ crucified throughout the area previously (3:1), though it was his own illness and time spent in the area recuperating, that had providentially made this possible (4:13). The Galatians, many of whom were Gentiles (4:8), had warmly welcomed Paul during his first visit (4:14-15). But now many of these same people had been deceived by those whom Paul describes as “trouble-makers” and “agitators” (1:7; 5:12), who had come into the region from elsewhere, looking to add new converts to their movement while boasting about the “flesh” of their converts (6:13). “Paul's intention is to rescue his Galatian congregations from falling from grace (5:4), a possibility that causes him deep personal anguish (3:1; 4:19; 5:12).”⁵ It is difficult to imagine a sterner rebuke to a group of churches than Paul's Epistle to the Galatians.

In the first nine verses of Galatians there is very little introductory material. Paul does not send greetings nor indulge in unnecessary small talk. The gospel is at stake and Paul gets right to the point.

1 Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— 2 and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia—

It is certainly not an accident that Paul begins this letter of rebuke by appealing to his own authority as an apostle. An apostle is one called by the Lord Jesus Christ himself and expressly commissioned by him for a specific purpose, namely the preaching of the gospel (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:17). Because Paul has been called by Jesus Christ, Paul teaches with the Lord's own authority. He preaches that same gospel that Jesus commissioned him to preach. This is something the false teachers cannot claim and this divinely-given authority is the basis for Paul's rebuke of those who have departed from his teaching.

While there is no hint of apostolic succession taught in the New Testament (as the apostles die off, they do not replace themselves with new apostles, but with ministers, elders and deacons) the New Testament does clearly teach the principal of historical succession. That is, the doctrine taught by those apostles commissioned directly by Jesus Christ to preach and teach his people, will indeed endure in Christ's church to the end of the age. Christ's teaching will be passed on to successive generations of Christians, even if only through a small remnant who remain faithful. It was our Lord himself who declared in Matthew 16:18, “*the gates of Hades will not prevail against my church.*” Therefore, the opponents of Paul who have departed from his teaching will find themselves opposing not only Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles, but Jesus Christ himself who is not an absentee landlord of his church.

The fact that Paul was an apostle meant that this call and his teaching about Jesus Christ did not come from his own imagination or ambitions. His gospel was not a human invention. Rather, his gospel was revealed to him by none other than the Lord of the church.

In mentioning the resurrection here, as he does, Paul is making it clear that he was appointed by the risen and glorified Lord who had appeared to all of the other disciples as well. There is absolutely no hint anywhere in the New Testament that Paul was a dissatisfied Jew seeking something more. His

⁴ Dunn calls Paul's comments a “crude and blackly humorous swipe.” Dunn, The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians, 1.

⁵ Thielman, Paul and the Law, p. 120.

conversion is consistently presented throughout the Book of Acts as dramatic and sudden, growing directly from his encounter with the Risen and Ascended Jesus while Paul was on his way to Damascus to hunt down and arrest Christians.

As Calvin so aptly describes this event, God would not only turn a wolf into a shepherd, he would make this particular shepherd the apostle to the Gentiles.⁶ Indeed, Paul makes frequent reference to the fact that while a distinct “ministry to Jews is certainly included in [his] call (see Acts 9:15), Paul himself often emphasizes that his call was particularly a call to preach to Gentiles” (Galatians 1:16; 1 Thess. 2:4; Romans 1:1, 5; 15:15-16).⁷

In verses 3-5, Paul sends his apostolic blessing to these churches he has helped to found.

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

For Paul, it is vital to connect the blessing given in the name of Christ to the redemption that Jesus Christ has accomplished for us. For the same Jesus Christ who sends his greetings to the Galatians is the same Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins upon Calvary’s cross. This is what we speak of as Christ’s *passive* obedience. Scripture says Jesus laid down his life for his sheep, it was not taken from him against his will (John 10:11). And Jesus did this, Paul says, not to rescue us from temporal danger, such as the violence that Paul had experienced at the hands of both Jew and Gentiles, who rejected the gospel that he was proclaiming. Rather, Jesus gave himself up to deliver us from the powers of this present evil age.

Like our Lord, Paul sees the course of human history as comprised of two distinct ages: “this present age,” which stands in marked contrast to that which he calls “the age to come.” In every case in the New Testament, “this age” is described in evil and temporal terms. It is the present period of time destined to end at the return of our Lord. “This age” stands in marked contrast to the “age to come,” which is characterized throughout the New Testament as an age of resurrection life, i.e. things eternal. “This age” is that period of time which precedes the coming of the Lord. It is an evil age dominated by worldly wisdom and philosophical speculation (1 Corinthians 1:20), while Satan blinds the minds of those apart from Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). It is also an age dominated by those who think that human merit is the basis for our entrance into heaven. It is an age where people mistakenly embrace the religion typical of modern America: good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. And no one, of course, regards themselves as a “bad person.”

This way of thinking can be found in the Old Testament (Genesis 4:1-16). Cain’s offering from the soil (the work of his own hand) in an attempt to earn favor with God, and is typical of the sinful religious impulse of this age of people who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18). For Paul, this present evil age is perhaps best characterized by our bondage to sin, now brought to light by the law of God (cf. Romans 7:7-8). The false teachers who beguile the Galatians are clearly theologians of “this age,” basing their hopes not upon the finished work of Christ and his imputed righteousness received by

⁶ Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Vol. 1, p. 256.

⁷ Carson, Moo, and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, p. 219.

faith alone, but upon the supposed merit of good works and human righteousness.

Not mincing any words, Paul gets right to his point in verses 6-9:

6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!

Paul is not only astonished at the error itself, but he expresses his astonishment at the speed at which the Galatians were so favorably responding to this false gospel.

Paul not been gone from the region very long, but the cloven hoof-print and the smell of sulphur, indicative of the efforts of Satan himself, are now present in these very churches where Paul had been so warmly and recently received just months earlier. As Paul will go on to state later in Galatians 2, even Peter and Barnabas had been taken in by these false teachers (2:11-13).

It did not take long for the false teachers to gain many converts, hence his amazement. But this should not really surprise us, because people love darkness rather than light (cf. John 3:19).

It is interesting to notice that Paul speaks of those Galatians who embraced this false teaching as “*deserting the one who called them,*” that is, deserting Jesus Christ. The word Paul uses is a term which is used of a desertion or revolt in a military or political sense and the word frequently conveyed the idea of a change in religion or philosophy.⁸ These false teachers have not improved upon the gospel, nor have they merely modified it for a specific cultural context. By changing or modifying the gospel which Paul had taught them, Paul says, they have deserted Christ himself. They are turncoats and traitors.

The doctrine of divine calling plays an important role in Paul’s theology.⁹ Paul’s overall argument throughout Galatians not only refutes the false teaching that we can be justified by works of the law, but at the same time, Paul repeatedly affirms the fact that all both Jew and Gentile are called to be members of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the New Israel of God, a phrase which Paul applies to the church in Galatians 6:16.

Just as Israel was called to return to the land at the time of restoration from exile, so too, Jew and Gentiles throughout Galatia have been called through the proclamation of Christ crucified.¹⁰ The church as the “New Israel” is a prominent theme throughout Galatians, as seen in several important echoes from the Old Testament.¹¹ The promised Holy Spirit, described in Galatians 3:13-14 is a direct fulfillment of Ezekiel 36 and 37, where the prophets foretells of a time when the Holy Spirit would create a new

⁸ Cf. the discussions in Bruce, Commentary on Galatians, p. 80, and; Fung, The Epistle to the Galatians, pp. 43-44.

⁹ Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, pp. 235-236.

¹⁰ Thielman, Paul and the Law, p. 135.

¹¹ Thielman, Paul and the Law, p. 135 ff

redeemed Israel from a valley of dried bones.

The language of a new exodus is used repeatedly throughout the letter. This is why Paul could . . .

express shock at the Galatians' near apostasy with words reminiscent of the biblical account of Israel's apostasy at Mount Sinai. In Exodus 32 God informs Moses that while he and Moses have been together on the mountain, the Israelites have turned to idols"Similarly, Paul marvels that the Galatians are `so hastily turning aside...from their calling' (1:6). Since the Galatians have been rescued in the long-awaited `new exodus,' Paul is astonished that they would imitate the error of ancient Israel and turn aside from God's redemption.¹²

In our deliverance from slavery as described in Galatians 4:21-31, the

metaphorical use of the concept of slavery to describe the domination of the Jewish people by foreign powers probably echoes the prediction in Deuteronomy 28:48, 68 that if God's people disobeyed the law, he would again enslave them to foreign powers just as they had once been enslaved to Egypt. It is probably also related to the prophet's equation of the experience of slavery in Egypt with exile under the Assyrians (Hos 11:11; Is 52:3-4).¹³

If the Judaizers succeed in Galatia, they do so by re-enslaving the very people that Christ died to set free. Just as disobedient Israel was taken into captivity by falling under God's judgment, so too, the Judaizers and those who follow them, also risk coming under God's judgment. The fact that Jew and Gentile were both called through the gospel of Jesus Christ means that a new age in redemptive history has dawned and that the Judaizers do not represent the faithful defenders of Israel. Instead they must be regarded as apostates from the true Israel, the church of Jesus Christ. This was a hard message to hear and a bitter pill to swallow and helps to explain why Jews so often opposed Paul's efforts at evangelism.

By teaching a gospel different from that which he had taught, the Judaizers were teaching what Paul calls a "different gospel," a gospel which is "no gospel," at all. There is only one gospel. It is defined in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 in terms of Christ's death, burial and resurrection, and elsewhere in terms of justification, as in Romans 1:16-17, where the gospel is the power of God, and in it, the righteousness of God is revealed.

It is crystal clear that for Paul, the very essence of the gospel is the doing and dying of Jesus Christ (Christ's death, burial and resurrection according to the Scriptures). And that doing and dying of Jesus Christ is the power of God unto salvation.

As such, the term "gospel" refers to Christ's historical work to provide for the salvation of sinners, both in his fulfilling of all righteousness and his death for our sins. The gospel is objective. That is, it is anchored in human history, in those things that Christ has done for us in time and space and which is "outside of ourselves," as Luther once put it. The gospel is not what the Holy Spirit is doing in us—it is what God has done for us and which the Holy Spirit applies to us (cf. Ephesians 1:3-14). To turn the gospel into anything else is to deny the gospel altogether. A different gospel is no gospel at all.

¹² Thielman, Paul and the Law, p. 136.

¹³ Thielman, Paul and the Law, p. 137.

According to Paul, the false teachers have perverted the gospel, a term which is in the aorist tense, meaning a complete and thorough change was made in the content of what was preached. In other words, Paul's gospel had been mutated and transformed into something else, "another gospel," which is "no gospel." This is why the gospel is said to be "of Christ," because the gospel is about Christ's work in history to save us from our sins, and because it is revealed to Paul by Christ himself.

Let us not miss what follows. The issue is the content of what is preached (the purity of the gospel) not the reputation or the abilities of the messenger who proclaims it. Thus, says Paul, even if an angel from heaven comes and preaches something other than what Paul had already preached to them, the angel is to be anathematized! As only he can, Luther once stated: "that which does not teach Christ is not apostolic, even if Peter and Paul be the teachers. On the other hand, that which does teach Christ is apostolic, even if Judas, Annas, Pilate or Herod should propound it."¹⁴ As he will go on to tell us latter in this letter, Paul is forced to confront Peter to his face, because when Peter gets caught with the smell of pork on his breath he gives in to the pressure of the Judaizers. Paul must correct him because the gospel is at stake.

In his condemnation of those preaching this different gospel, Paul uses the term "*anathema*," which means to be accursed or dedicated for destruction. To put in plain language, Paul is saying if anyone preaches to you a gospel other than what I preached, they will fall under God's curse! This is no slight thing, and this warning comes with the full authority of Paul's office as the apostle to the Gentiles, that is, with the authority of Jesus himself.

Paul's warnings to the Galatians should ring in our ears today. If a false gospel could arise and be so widely accepted almost immediately after Paul and Barnabas had preached to the Galatians in person—to the extent that even Peter and Barnabas could be taken in—this should warn us not to be surprised that evangelical and Reformed leaders fall from grace and begin teaching another gospel, as we have repeatedly seen in our own age. In fact, sad to say, we should expect it. This is why we must always be on our guard for those who teach that the death of Christ is not enough to save us from God's wrath in the judgement yet to come. The false gospel—that we are saved by the merits of Christ plus something we do—makes a great deal of sense to Americans who think that religion in general and Christianity in particular, is primarily about ethics and that doctrine is not important.

If someone believes that Christianity is essentially about making bad people into good people, or making good people into better people, Paul's stress upon Christ crucified for sinners, will sound completely foreign. The Biblical writers tell us that the cross is foolishness to the Greek and a stumbling block to the Jew. Why, then, should we be surprised if it is both to modern Americans? The American religion is the religion of Cain and comes to fruition in the teaching that people are basically good and fully capable of coming up with something acceptable to God. "All that God wants is our best," is Cain's motto. There will always be those in our midst urging us to soften the offense of the cross, or perhaps, to remove it all together. Far too many people today are willing to provide a church of the lowest common denominator under the guise of welcoming "seekers." But given Paul's view of sin ("there is no one who seeks God" Romans 3:11), it is important to remind ourselves that it is God who seeks sinners. And it is through the proclamation of the gospel, and only through the proclamation of that gospel does God call men and women to faith in his Son. We must never even entertain the thought of changing or softening our gospel, lest our gospel become no gospel at all and we fall under Paul's anathema.

¹⁴ Luther, "Preface to the Epistle of James," Luther's Works, Vol. 7, pp. 384 ff.

It is also clear from Paul's argument that the issue here is the content of what is preached, not the reputation or the abilities of the preacher. A preacher's credentials should have nothing to do with how charismatic or compelling he may be, but with whether or not he preaches the gospel faithfully. Faithfulness to the gospel is the standard by which a minister of word and sacrament in Christ's church will be judged by the Lord of the church. Let us say it clearly. There is no excuse for boring preaching. Nor is there any excuse for preaching which is poorly organized, confusing and difficult to understand, or otherwise not compelling. But in an entertainment driven culture, such as ours, we have been trained from infancy to evaluate things by how they make us feel, or by how well they hold our diminished attention spans, or even worse, by whether or not we were entertained.

Paul lost so much ground so quickly because, by his own admission, the Judaizers were more charismatic and entertaining than he, and they were willing to scratch where the audience had an itch. The natural man longs to hear the message that God only wants his best efforts, for we are all capable of that much. Given our present context, we are especially vulnerable to the deception of those who Paul calls the silver-tongued super-apostles (cf. 2 Corinthians 11), and who will captivate us, motivate us, excite us, and then steal our souls and empty our wallets before they move on to their next victims.

In the light of Paul's teaching, it seems to me that two major errors can be made today. One of these stems from a lack of courage or conviction. This occurs when a church tolerates a false gospel in which it is taught that our justification stems, in part, from the merit of human works or the performance of religious rites and ceremonies such as circumcision. A symptom of this is visible today when Christians say that doctrine doesn't matter, and that what really matters is love and unity, and that we must embrace anyone and everyone who claims to be a Christian, in spite of their teaching about justification by grace alone, through faith alone, on account of Christ alone. We see a clear example of this in the *Evangelicals and Catholics Together* dialogue (ECT), in which evangelical and Catholic leaders claim that they really believe the same things and that we should all simply agree to end our 450 year dispute about the gospel for the sake of joint co-operation in the culture wars and third world-evangelism. But it is Paul who reminds us that any so-called gospel, such as Rome's Tridentine gospel of justification by faith *and* by works, is no gospel at all. Before we concern ourselves with world evangelism, should we not first of all concern ourselves with getting the gospel right?

The second error here is also quite serious, and is the error into which we are more apt to fall. The first error is to say that love covers all doctrinal differences so that it is love which ultimately matters and correct doctrine which doesn't. Thus the error of the Judaizers is tolerated because "they love Jesus too." Cain's offering was just as good as Abel's because he was sincere. But those who make this second error contend that doctrinal purity is the end and sum of church life and that any requirement to love the brethren outside our own tradition is negated, because such people disagree with us on other doctrinal matters not related to the doctrine of justification.

There are many who embrace the gospel *sola fide* as taught by Paul, but who stand outside the confessional Reformed tradition and who differ from us in other important areas of doctrine. I am a Reformed minister who subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity *ex corde*. But I need to be reminded, as I am sure many of you do as well, that it is Paul who tells us in Galatians 2:16 that we cannot be justified by the works of the law and in Galatians 5:6 that the faith which justifies us freely in Christ inevitably expresses itself in love for the brethren, that is, all those who embrace the gospel taught by Paul *sola fide*.

Now this does not mean that we do not have serious differences with our evangelical and Lutheran friends, but it does mean that all those who affirm Paul's gospel of justification *sola fide* are on our side

in this battle against Judaizers and those who preach a false gospel! Our enemies are those who do not preach or believe the biblical gospel, not those non-Reformed Christians who nevertheless embrace justification *sola fide*, however doctrinally inconsistent they are in other areas. Since Paul draws the line at the gospel of an imputed righteousness, who are we to draw it any narrower? No, we should not deny or down-play what are real differences amongst those who otherwise hold to Paul's gospel. But we must regard all who affirm Paul's gospel as our brothers and sisters in Christ and we must seek to love one another as our Lord commanded, so that we might be one before the watching world.

And, lest we forget, our own history as Reformed Christians should remind us that the breeding ground for the "love is everything, doctrine is nothing" sentiment, is a church context where "doctrine is everything and love for the brethren is nothing." People react to the critical and mean-spirited tendency of some of the Reformed orthodox, by blaming orthodox doctrine, a very sad situation, since it is orthodox doctrine which insists that both the doctrine of justification, by grace alone though faith alone, on account of Christ alone, and that justifying faith will express itself in love, are equally true.

Therefore, while we have spoken at great length of the false gospel, let us not forget the ramifications of the true gospel and what we lose if we capitulate to modern Judaizers. Paul's gospel teaches us that Jesus Christ has died for all of our sins (past, present and future), and that the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to us through faith alone. If Paul's gospel is the true gospel, it means that a sinner such as I can actually go to heaven, since when I measure myself by the law, I know that I have not the slightest chance of earning enough merit or possessing enough good works to stand in God's presence.

Paul's gospel means that every sinner who trusts in Jesus Christ alone can know that their sins are forgiven and that they are headed for heaven when they die.

Paul's gospel is everything, for it teaches us that if we are trusting in Christ Jesus, his death avails for our sins—his blood washes the guilt of our sins away—and that his perfect obedience is reckoned as our own. This is the only way for sinful men and women to stand before the Holy God in the judgement yet to come.

And it would figure that this would be the place where Satan himself would direct his attacks—rarely in frontal assaults, more often in subtle re-definition. For the gospel as taught by Paul is "all of Christ." But Satan will find a way to make it "some of Christ and some of me." For a gospel that is "some of Christ and some of me," is a different gospel from that which Paul taught, and tragically, is no gospel at all.

This is why we must always be willing to fight for the gospel. If we lose the gospel, we have lost everything. But if we have the gospel we have everything we need for our only comfort in life and in death. For in the gospel, we have Jesus Christ and all his saving merits. What else do we need?