

**Sermon Text: Galatians 1:6-9 (NKJV)**

<sup>6</sup> I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, <sup>7</sup> which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

**Sermon Theme: That We Might Not Lose the Rediscovered Gospel Once Again.**

In the name of our crucified and risen Savior Jesus Christ who has blessed us with the incomparable gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation, dear fellow redeemed;

Reformation Day is an occasion worthy of celebration and thanksgiving to the LORD. We rejoice and give thanks on this special day, because this is the anniversary of the Reformation Movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> century in which the Gospel of Christ, which had long been obscured and perverted in the external church, was by the grace of God once again brought to the light of day and proclaimed both far and wide in all its glorious truth and splendor.

That wonderful rediscovered message is the good news of God's gracious gift of salvation to sinful mankind through Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul makes known these glad tidings in his letter to the Romans, where he writes, "But now the righteousness of (from) God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of (from) God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." (3:21-24,28)

All mankind who without exception have sinned against God and are therefore deserving of everlasting condemnation have been shown God's mercy and grace through Jesus Christ. Instead of condemning the world eternally in hell, our heavenly Father in His infinite, unmerited love sent His beloved Son Jesus Christ to make full atonement for all the sins of the whole world. On the basis of Jesus' redemptive work alone, sinners are justified before God, that is, God has declared us righteous in His sight, having forgiven us of all our sins through Jesus Christ. This wonderful blessing of forgiveness and finally eternal salvation in heaven through Jesus Christ is a gift of God's grace, freely given without any merit or worthiness in us. And we received and enjoyed the full benefit of all this when we were led by the Spirit of God to repent of our sins and believe on Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

Mindful of these priceless treasures found in and received through the Gospel, we rejoice and give thanks to God not only for uncovering the Gospel truths and making them widely known in the Reformation period, but also for making it possible for us

many years later to know and receive with believing hearts the message of God's saving grace in Christ Jesus. For in order to ensure that we and many others might be partakers of the spiritual and eternal blessings of the Gospel, down through the centuries of time God caused His Word of life to be proclaimed and His Holy Sacraments to be administered so that people in every generation of time might come to know and believe in our Savior Jesus Christ.

Having tasted of the sweet Gospel message of salvation, we cannot help but be filled with amazement as to how the Gospel could be lost. The Scripture text before us today helps us to better understand how such a great tragedy can take place and at the same time helps us to guard against the loss of the Gospel in our midst.

The epistle to the Galatians was an inspired letter written by the apostle Paul to a number of Christian congregations in the Asia Minor province of Galatia. The Galatians were first introduced to the Gospel of Christ and their congregations were formed when Paul came there on his second mission trip. Paul returned a second time to Galatia in order to strengthen them in Christian knowledge, faith, and hope. However, much to Paul's amazement and consternation a short time later he learned that the churches in Galatia were in process of sliding down the slippery slope of losing the Gospel truths.

This was due in part to certain false teachers known as Judaizers who had worked their way into these congregations. Judaizers were Jews who believed that Jesus' death on the cross paid for human sin. However, they didn't believe that a person was saved alone by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. They held that a person must also faithfully observe the various laws of Moses in order to be saved. And so, they were telling the Gentile Christians in Galatia that they had to observe the Old Testament festivals like the Passover and refrain from eating pork and circumcise the males, along with other laws in order to be justified before God.

This human scheme of salvation was the misbelief that a person is saved through faith in Jesus and by performing works of the law. But this teaching was in direct contradiction to what the apostle Paul revealed in Holy Scripture, for he said, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law."

Paul also made known that if anyone depended on his own efforts at keeping the law of God in order to be saved, that person would have to keep all the laws of God without fail. Otherwise he would come under the curse of God. Paul writes in this regard, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'" (Gal.3:10)

In spite of Paul's testimony, Judaizers were able to persuade some of the Galatians to follow their teachings instead of Paul's. They accomplished this by convincing them that Paul wasn't really an apostle of Jesus Christ and therefore was not to be believed.

The Judaizers also deceived the people by using some of the same Christian terms when promoting their false teachings. For example, they called their work righteous teachings the Gospel of Christ.

Another likely reason for the ready reception of their teachings of work

righteousness is that it was appealing to human pride. Sinful pride can cause us to think that we can contribute to our own salvation either in part or in whole by performing works that will make us acceptable to God.

This scenario was not too much different from what happened in the Christian church prior to the Reformation. There too, certain religious teachers had perverted the Gospel of Christ by introducing work righteous teachings in the church. In this, however, instead of questioning Paul's apostleship, they added manmade teachings to the Bible and misinterpreted Paul's divine teachings of the Gospel.

An example of this was their teaching on purgatory which is not taught in the Bible, but was dreamt up in human minds. This is based on the belief that Jesus' death on the cross didn't pay for all our sins. And therefore sinners would have to perform various religious rites and meritorious deeds in order to be absolved of the sins Jesus didn't take care of by His redemptive work. And if you are not successful in making satisfaction for those extra sins, you would supposedly end up in a place called purgatory. There you would have to suffer punishment for those sins before going to heaven. The Catholic Church also added the provision that loved ones back in this temporal world could have masses said which are supposed to shorten the time in purgatory. Sadly and most tragically this false teaching and faulty practice is still in force in the Catholic Church.

This is very much like the error of the Judaizers who believed that a person can be saved through faith in Christ plus through the performance of human works and deeds according the laws of Moses.

In addition to the spiritually destructive teaching of work righteousness by the Judaizers and the Catholic Church, we also find evidence of similar false teachings in various liberal Protestant churches. These are the very churches that are supposed to be heirs of the blessed heritage of the Reformation. But just as the Judaizers and the Catholic Church have caused the loss of the Gospel, so also with liberal Protestant churches.

Their loss of the Gospel came about when they showed an unwillingness to accept all the Bible as God's Word. As a result of this, they don't accept everything Paul wrote in his epistles.

And if anyone is familiar with his epistles, they can see that they are filled with the precious truths of the Gospel of Christ.

Because of their unwillingness to accept all the revelations in Bible as God's Word, the sad outcome of this is the Gospel of Christ being compromised. They either teach that mankind's salvation is solely dependent upon human good works or that they can be saved by cooperating with God, meeting Him halfway.

The apostle Paul has some strong words of warning for anyone promoting a false gospel, saying, "If we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel than what you have received, let him be accursed." Paul speaks words of condemnation for those who proclaim a false gospel, because their faulty teachings can cause people to lose the only hope of salvation which is

through faith in Jesus Christ.

The responsibility for the Galatians going down the path that led to the loss of the Gospel did not rest alone with the false teachers. The Galatians were also partly to blame. Paul said to them, "I marvel that you are turning (that is, that you are permitting yourselves to be turned) away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel." It was the Galatians who welcomed the Judaizers into their midst and lent a willing ear to their teachings, in spite of the fact that those teachings ran contrary to the saving truths that Paul had delivered to them. Like the Galatians, Christians in every age period can become easy prey for false teachers and eventually lose the Gospel, if they are not vigilant and watchful guardians of the Christian beliefs and allow themselves to fall into the spirit of complacency or apathy.

Many are the Bible passages that warn us to watch out for false teachers who come to us with spiritually destructive errors (cf. Matt.7:15,16). And not only are we to be on the lookout for them, but we are also instructed not to sit at their feet to learn from them. Rather we are to avoid them (cf. Rom.16:17).

In order that we might be able to detect false teachings and retain the precious Gospel truths that save, the Lord instructs us to diligently continue to read, study, hear, and meditate on His words and teachings (cf. John10:27,28; Col.3:16; 2 Tim.1:13,14; 2 Tim.3:14-17)

God has graciously blessed us with the wonderful heritage of the Reformation Movement by delivering to us the Gospel of salvation and by creating faith in our hearts to believe it. May God the Holy Spirit ever help us to retain the precious Gospel of Christ in order that we might continue to know and believe in Jesus for our eternal salvation and to proclaim that message of hope to all those whom God would have us serve. Amen.