

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours in the name of our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The title for today's message is "No other Gospel!" and is based on the Epistle reading, from Galatians 1. Let us pray... Amen.

Today there are many sources of information in this world and it is easy to distort what is reported. People can comment and say how something looks to them; no expertise is required. Facts can be selected, tweaked and twisted. And so, what source do we trust when it comes to knowing the ways of God?

In the area of eternal life and salvation there are two sources of information in this world around us. One makes alive—it gives life, while the other kills—it takes life away. One is from God, the Triune: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the other is from man. Both sources are clear, and they are completely opposite. The two cannot live together. They both cannot be true. They both cannot and DO NOT save.

Now Paul was familiar with both forms. His life illustrates the difference. Paul had been tremendously zealous for the traditions handed down to him from his fathers. He was a well trained Pharisee who believed and religiously followed those traditions handed down from his Jewish fathers. He was convinced that by following those traditions he would earn eternal life.

Paul grew up trusting in what he had been taught. He was born Jewish and he followed the rigorous demands of the Jewish traditions; He followed the Law. He grew up 'knowing' that his actions would save him. He so trusted his actions and the teachings of his fathers that he actively and zealously persecuted the Christian church. He wanted it gone because it went completely against what he was taught. He thought it was a lie. He didn't like their message. He didn't like their Saviour. He didn't understand the grace God freely poured out because Paul 'knew' he had to follow the Law, as revealed in the traditions in order to be saved. He had all the confidence in the world that he was part of God's chosen people and would be saved because that is what he was taught by the Jewish traditions. He later expressed his earlier confidence to the Philippian church saying "**though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.**"(Phil 3:4-6)

A very similar message of works was being proclaiming by some to the Galatian church. They were told that they needed to follow the works of the Law, at least a little. They had to make sure they were doing enough to make and keep themselves righteous. The teaching was that one starts out good and then has to do enough to be saved. One must live a good life; they had to be a good Jew or convert. And so, as long as anyone did good, that was enough, even more so if you had the birthright. This was the message to the Galatian, this is what Paul was taught, and a similar message continues to be taught in the world today.

This message has been, and continues to be, taught from the world, but it is dead wrong. It is dead wrong because your good works will NEVER save you. My righteous deeds will NEVER save me. All the good we do will NEVER earn us a place in heaven. All of our good works, all our honorable deeds, all the positive things we do in this world will NEVER, EVER, earn us a place in heaven. Everything we do, or ever could do, does absolutely and completely nothing towards earning or securing our eternal salvation. Nothing! The reason is because we are not born innocent. On our own two feet we are not even a little good. You and I were born terrible and ghastly sinners.

The devil, the world, and your sinful self loves to lie to you and tell you how naturally good and righteous you, but this message is dead wrong. Children conceived and still in the womb are, as David tells, ‘Conceived in sin’ and rightfully and fully deserve of the eternal punishment their sin deserves. Every newborn baby is a vile and guilty sinner also completely deserving of the eternal and everlasting fires of hell. Why, because “**there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**”(Rom 3:22b-23) and “**the wages of sin is death**”(Rom 6:23a).

Everyone here is a sinner. We all rightfully deserve and should justly expect from our works our eternal separation from God. You and I, our good and righteous works apart from Christ and His salvation are worth less than a stinking soiled garment.

Yet this world still teaches that same damnable message. It mixes human traditions and works with God’s Word. This mixed message only condemns. It gives false confidence to those who hear it, and encourages people to trust in themselves and their own works for salvation. It teaches the idea that we needed to do something, we need to add something to what Christ has already done for us to be saved. The end result is this teaching puts man’s traditions up and against God’s clear Word revealed to us in Scripture. The end result is people follow and worship traditions instead of our only Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Paul faced this same problem in the Galatian church and wrote this letter to stop it dead. Yet, we continue to face it today. For Paul in his letter to the Galatian, he makes it clear how his authority comes from God and not from man. Paul explains of both, the traditions of his fathers, and God’s inspired Word, because he has seen both. Paul explains his former confidence in his works and his zeal, but how Jesus Himself revealed something different. Paul re-affirms how what he was preaching was not man’s gospel but God’s. It is not based on tradition. It is not taught by man but it is taught by God. We continue to preach this same Gospel each and every Sunday.

Yet, even today, some still tell a mixed message. There continue to be voices who try to mix the clear Gospel message of our “**Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father**”(Gal 1:3b-4) with a need for us to help the process along. There are some who continue to try to blend Christ and Him crucified and risen for our salvation with a message of a necessity of works.

We hear the call for doing the right thing rather than trusting in Jesus’ righteousness. This message presumes that doing good things makes us good people. God and everyone else should see us as more acceptable, or more righteous than those who fail to do the same thing.

Now, it is not that the Law or following the Law is not a good thing. It is imperative that people follow the Law because it was given to us by God to give guidelines and boundaries in this life. God’s Law is holy and perfect, yet “**by works of the law no human being will be justified in God’s sight, since through the law comes *only* knowledge of sin.**”(Rom 3:20) The Law never saves, it only condemns. It very effectively shows us our sins and how far we have fallen from grace. So, to force people to follow the Law with the promise of eternal salvation for following the Law is the same as telling people that if they follow all the traffic laws that they will be rewarded with a new car by the police when they stop driving. Following the law only prevents punishment, it never rewards.

Instead God provided us the only way to be saved. God called Paul to proclaim this Gospel of salvation in Christ and solely because of Christ’s work in our place. God has given us His Word of eternal life. God’s Word is not based on traditions, nor was it made by man. **“For no prophecy of Scripture was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.”**(2 Peter 1:21) The Bible is the inspired Word of God which tells of our Saviour, the One who came to save us poor, and miserable, horrible, vile, and ghastly sinners. The Bible tells of the One who came in our flesh to save us because we had absolutely no chance to save ourselves. Christ came because there was no other way for you and me to be saved.

It is by faith in Christ and His work in our place which saves us. Faith does not come from performing works; rather faith comes by hearing, and hearing the Word of Christ. **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**(Eph 2:8-9)

God’s Word has the power to bring us from death to life. God’s Word has the power to break our hardened hearts. It has the power to forgive our sins in, and on account of, Christ. We heard of this transformation from death to life in both the Old Testament and Gospel readings where Elijah raised a widow’s son and Jesus raised a widow’s son, attesting to God’s mercy and power and how in both instances the gift brought a thankful response. In both readings, the sons had nothing to do with the giving of the gift of new life. Neither could offer or could do anything for the gift of life they received. The only thing they could do was glorify God.

The early Christians also glorified God at the hearing of Paul’s proclamation of the Gospel, the one He earlier was trying to destroy. They glorified God for the phenomenal gift of grace, forgiveness, deliverance, and new life they had in Christ entirely, and only, because of what Christ had done for them.

With all the sources of information we have, let us hold fast to God’s clearly revealed Word inspired and recorded in the Bible. There is no other Gospel of eternal life. God’s Word is not a tradition; it was not made by man; instead it was given to us by God. Because of it, we too can continue to glorify God for His grace, mercy, forgiveness, and deliverance poured out on us through the working of the Holy Spirit in God’s Word and Sacrament. We were blessed with, and covered by, Christ’s righteousness in our baptism; our faith is strengthened through hearing His Word, and we continue to be blessed with Christ’s forgiveness offers here today in His supper for the forgiveness of all our sins.

Let us continue to glorify God in our life in Christ, not trying to earn our salvation, but thanking God for His grace and deliverance. There is only one source of salvation, that is Jesus Christ the only Son of God and His work which redeems us, saves us, and gives us eternal life. Amen.

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