

I.N.I.

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 26, 2011

Galatians 1:1-10

In Christ Jesus, Who alone is the Way, the Truth and the Life, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

One of the papers given at this summer's CLC General Pastoral Conference was entitled "CLC Youth Exodus." It was both a summary report of a questionnaire sent to a little over 20 young people who had left the CLC over the past 10 years and also an analysis and recommendation as to what we can learn from it. It was saddening to hear some of the reasons why these young people left our congregations and our synod. Most of the reasons centered around their disagreement with our teaching on fellowship and what they perceived and judged as a dead orthodoxy, teaching the truth but demonstrating a lack of a joyful, living spirit of evangelism among the pastors and members. The majority of them have joined non-denominational churches.

We do need to often re-examine what we teach and preach and how we reach out to individuals from within our congregation as well as to those outside. Even though we proclaim that our doctrine is pure, we are not, in fact far from it. We are not flawless as pastors, as members, as church leaders and as a synod and we do have to admit to spiritual laziness in our outreach. But to throw away doctrinal purity for misplaced feelings or perceived judgments on the synod as a whole is not God-pleasing.

These young people have instead joined themselves to churches who do not emphasize the Means of Grace—the Gospel in word and Sacraments and therefore do not teach Baptism and the Lord's Supper correctly, i.e. as God's giving us forgiveness of sins, eternal life and salvation. Most of these churches deny infant baptism. They have joined churches who teach that we have the ability and power to decide to believe in Jesus, then the Holy Spirit will enter our heart. Some of these churches also use the Law to motivate their members to give offerings and do good works. This is extremely dangerous to their faith life.

The Galatian Christians had the **GOOD NEWS** of Jesus Christ preached to them. They were led out of the captivity of sin and unbelief by the Holy Spirit working through the message of a perfect Savior who gave His life as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. And what were they in the process of doing with that **GOOD NEWS?**-throwing it away.

Our theme from this morning's sermon text is this:

**DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR GOOD NEWS!**

**I: By rejecting the One who calls you by His grace**

**II: By accepting man-made teaching as gospel**

Who were the Galatians? They were the people who lived in Galatia, the area known as Asia Minor, now known as Turkey. There were mainly Gentiles living here, but Jews also had moved into some of these areas. Paul had gone through this area on his second missionary journey around 51 A.D. At that time the Lord used Paul and his preaching to establish several Christian congregations: Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. On his third missionary journey Paul again returned to these churches and strengthened them with the Word.

Shortly thereafter false teachers from among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem came up to this area and thoroughly confused these new congregations. They taught that Paul was not a real Apostle and that his teaching was not the true Gospel. They taught that in order to be assured of your salvation, one must not only believe in Jesus Christ, but also do all those works which Moses had

commanded the children of Israel in the Old Testament. In other words they were mixing the beautiful Gospel with the legalistic commands and customs of the Old Testament. And the Galatians were falling for it. They were throwing away the **GOOD NEWS** of God's Word for man-made teachings and customs.

When Paul heard about this he wrote this letter. Paul was deeply concerned that these believers in Galatia were abandoning their faith in Christ alone for the sake of human opinions and customs. We notice in this letter that the Apostle Paul is sometimes harsh in his words, very direct, stern and to the point. He doesn't beat around the bush or mince words. This shows the urgency of the situation and the eternal consequences of their actions. Paul's letter to the Galatians therefore is a call to recognize the eternal danger of mixing faith in Christ with human opinion and teaching. And lest we think that this is just a lesson on history, something that happened almost 2,000 years ago and has little effect on our life, we repeat our theme again:

### **DON'T THROW AWAY YOUR GOOD NEWS!**

This same danger is just as real today, if not more so, then back then. Paul begins his letter in the customary way, mentioning himself as the author. But then he quickly jumps into the foray with a defense of his apostleship. **“PAUL, AN APOSTLE(NOT FROM MEN NOR THROUGH MAN, BUT THROUGH JESUS CHRIST AND GOD THE FATHER WHO RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD),...”**

The word apostle means someone who is "sent out." Jesus sent out His apostles to preach the Gospel to all the world. Paul was not part of that select group of men. But when Paul was converted on the way to Damascus the Lord through Ananias said this about Paul **“HE IS A CHOSEN VESSEL OF MINE TO BEAR MY NAME BEFORE GENTILES, KINGS, AND THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL.”** Paul was in the full sense of the word an **APOSTLE**, just like John and Peter, Matthew and James. This calling of his was not by some man, or through a human being but from Jesus Himself and from God the Father. Therefore what Paul proclaimed and what he wrote had divine authority.

Paul in these opening words so beautifully lays forth the blessings that these Galatian Christians have through Jesus. God's **GRACE**, His undeserved love is theirs. The unmerited grace that is responsible for our salvation. This **GRACE** at work through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus brings about **PEACE** in our hearts. The Galatians were no longer at war with God, separated from God because of their sins. There was now a oneness brought about by Christ. He tore down the wall of separation, by being that atoning sacrifice, that sufficient payment for their sins. Paul clearly states this in these words, **“WHO (JESUS) GAVE HIMSELF FOR OUR SINS, THAT HE MIGHT DELIVER US FROM THIS PRESENT EVIL AGE ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF OUR GOD AND FATHER.”**

This world has not changed from Paul's day. The whole world lay in wickedness, sin and death back then and it still does today. By nature all are born spiritually dead in sins, blind to God and enemies of His. We too, were by nature, conceived and born into this evil world, lost and condemned, belonging to Satan and this corrupt generation. But Jesus gave Himself for us to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of His Father. To God then be glory forever and ever.

Notice how Paul in these words so clearly directs all thoughts and words to Christ for righteousness and away from any personal goodness or righteousness of his own. How powerful, how effective was Jesus' death on Calvary? Paul tells us that the Savior's one-time sacrifice has redeemed us, delivered us from sin and all of its consequences.

Do you see what Paul is building up to, the point he is making? If our Lord Jesus Christ gave

Himself for our sins, in order to deliver and to save us, according to the will of His Father, should we then permit ourselves to be deceived by false teachers and to think that we ourselves must still add something of our own? Should we so dishonor the merit of our Savior Jesus and disgrace the gracious will of our heavenly Father?

Paul in great agitation of heart and soul continues. **“I MARVEL THAT YOU ARE TURNING AWAY SO SOON FROM HIM WHO CALLED YOU IN THE GRACE OF CHRIST, TO A DIFFERENT GOSPEL, WHICH IS NOT ANOTHER; BUT THERE ARE SOME WHO TROUBLE YOU AND WANT TO PERVERT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST.”** The Galatians were in the process of turning away, falling away, throwing away the **GOOD NEWS** of Jesus Christ for a different gospel, which Paul says is really no gospel, no good news at all. What was this different gospel? It was the age old error of mixing Law and Gospel. The false teachers in Galatia did not deny Christ, they did not say give up your faith in Jesus as your Savior. They wanted to hold fast to Christ, but they also wanted to hold fast to the Law and customs of the Old Testament requirements. They wanted to hold fast to **WORKS!** They believed that the doing of the law was also necessary for salvation, that one is justified not only by faith but by obedience, by observing the Law.

This type of teaching is readily acceptable to all human beings, for by nature man's mind is legalistic and thinks he can do it on his own. This mixing of the Good News of what Christ has done for us with the ever appealing teaching that we too also need to do something in order to make our salvation complete, was stealing the hearts of these Galatian Christians. And Paul was sickened.

To many in our day the differences also do not seem that serious. But they are eternally serious. Paul clearly taught:

- 1) Jesus Christ lived and died for you.
- 2) Believe on the Lord Jesus and you are saved.
- 3) Once you are brought to such saving faith you will out of love for your Savior want to keep His law.

The false teachers taught:

- 1) Jesus Christ lived and died for you.
- 2) Believe on the Lord Jesus.
- 3) Keep the Law of God as best you can and then you will be saved. Hairsplitting? Nitpicking?

Paul says **LET THEM BE ACCURSED!** Be damned, judged by God. It is no little thing when we take away from Christ's work. Our salvation rests wholly, completely, entirely upon Christ and what He has done for us. His perfect life of obedient love, His perfect sacrifice upon the cross for our sins, His resurrection back to life. There is only one Gospel, one revelation from God through His Word. Anything else that is added, is a perversion of the one true Gospel, and thus destroys it all. Jesus cried out from the cross, **IT IS FINISHED!** All of it, done for mankind. Isaiah said it many years before Jesus even came: **HE FOR US!** Not every one for himself.

Any amount of trust or confidence in our good works--our church attendance, our prayers, our offerings, as if in some way they earn brownie points before God, or merit God's love for us, or somehow make us better than others--destroys Christ's work. The three Reformation principles that the Lutheran Church is built upon is **FAITH ALONE, GRACE ALONE, SCRIPTURE ALONE.** The false teachers taught faith, not alone but mixed with good works; grace, not alone but mixed with our love for God, and Scripture, not alone but mixed with man's enlightened knowledge and opinions.

This was and is the type of error that creeps in subtly and corrupts very silently. There is no bold, brash statement against Christ and the cross. There is no open contradiction of his suffering and death

on the cross; but there is the ever pleasing thought left with our sinful flesh, “now make your salvation complete, obey the law, keep the commandments, do your part, your good deeds and then you'll be saved.” We corrupt God's **GOOD NEWS** for us when we measure our worth and value by what we do and not do by what Jesus has done for us.

Paul says that even if he and his colleagues or an angel from heaven preach any other Gospel than that of Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the sins of the world, let them be accursed. In fact he felt so strongly about this sole means of salvation and the importance of their getting the point of his letter that he repeated the message: **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.**

The Good News is very clear and very simple. **GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON THAT WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM SHALL NOT PERISH BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE.** No mention of our doing anything. Even the believing is impossible for us to do on our own. **NO MAN CAN SAY THAT JESUS IS THE LORD EXCEPT BY THE HOLY GHOST.** What a Gospel! What a Savior!

But these false teachers apparently were convinced that Paul denounced these Old Testament laws and customs in order to win Gentile converts. Such was not the case at all. Paul writes that he would not use such strong language if his only concern were to please people or persuade them. We read in verse 10: **FOR DO I NOW PERSUADE MEN, OR GOD? OR DO I SEEK TO PLEASE MEN? FOR IF I STILL PLEASED MEN, I WOULD NOT BE A SERVANT OF CHRIST.** Paul is a servant, a slave to Christ and to His Word alone. So should every pastor and Christian teacher be. We should not be men-pleasers, but Law and Gospel speakers. We should not scratch the itching ears of those who only want to hear what pleases them, but proclaim what our sin-sick hearts need to hear.

A Missouri Synod pastor of the late 1800's and early 1900's named Carl Manthey Zorn wrote a commentary on this letter of Paul to the Galatians. His last paragraph on these verses could have been written yesterday. We close this morning's sermon with his words.

**“The time for being pleasing to men is a thing of the past for this faithful apostle. That every servant of the Word should keep in mind and steadfastly and unswervingly preach the gospel and testify against the false prophets, who confuse the Christians and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. And, you Christians, do not grumble if your pastor does the same, but demand of him that he do so for your salvation's sake. Thank God if He gives you a shepherd who does this! For the church of Christ now is in a pitiful condition and all kinds of storms of false teaching are passing over it... the church of Christ now is only too full of, and oppressed by, false teachers who want to confuse the Christians and to pervert the gospel of Christ--only too full under all sorts of names, including even the name Evangelical Lutheran. Pay no attention to such! Avoid them! Far, far removed from you be the talk so often heard from those who have already been misled or those who are indifferent; "Oh, of what good is all that? One certainly hears something good in every church!" Rather say to the Lord; "I hate vain thoughts, but Thy law do I love. Uphold me according to Thy Word that I may live." Amen.**