

## **Other Gospels**

### **By David Feddes**

Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians because they had heard from him the real gospel of Jesus Christ, but after a while some of them were tempted or even turning away to something else. Galatians is one of the hardest-hitting books of the Bible. The apostle is very upset at the false message and the false apostles, and he's also very concerned about these people whom he introduced to Jesus and are now in danger of falling away.

"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed! As we have said before, so now I say again: if anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed! Am I now seeking the approval of man or of God? Or am I still trying to please man? If I were trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ." (Galatians 1:6–12)

A little later in the letter he says, "You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? So again I ask: Does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard?" (Galatians 3:1–5)

Then Paul writes to the Corinthians: "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles... For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds" (2 Corinthians 11:2-5, 13-15).

Other gospels were a problem and a threat at the time that the church was first being launched around the Mediterranean world in New Testament times. And other gospels are still a great danger today. Other gospels take various forms, whether religions or non-religious ideologies.

## Other gospels

- **Religion**
  - Legalist
  - Magical
- **Ideology**
  - Nationalist
  - Progressive

### *Legalist*

The other gospel that Paul warned the Galatians about was a legalistic gospel. It was a religious teaching, and it even had a place for Jesus in it somewhere. But it was a gospel that was insisting that you still had to live by all of the things that the Jewish people had to live by under the law of Moses. All of the ceremonies were binding, including circumcision. All of the civil commands for running a society were binding. These were not only binding, but were necessary for salvation. Salvation was equal to Jesus plus a bunch of other stuff.

Paul opposed that kind of gospel where people were trying go back from the gospel revelation and the giving of the Holy Spirit and the sufficiency of Jesus' death and resurrection, and say that you really do need to do this, and this, and this, and this. In this legalistic gospel, certain behaviors, certain rules, certain rituals are the key to being right with God.

That is a type of gospel that can threaten and divert people away from the true gospel still today. It won't be identical to the old legalism, but sometimes it comes close to that, where people are still trying to use various rituals and observances to establish their standing with God. They might not be the requirements that were in the law of Moses. Instead it's just various invented expectations and behaviors. Certain religious groups will have their practices. They'll define exactly how you ought to dress. They'll define exactly how you ought to behave. They will explain that one drop of liquor might be enough to ruin everything.

Islam is an example of a gospel that has done that, where they have a long list of regulations. Islam has a place for Jesus. He was the third-greatest prophet of all the prophets. That's pretty high up there, right? Third greatest—not bad! Islam is one version of a legalistic gospel that has now been embraced by hundreds of millions of people. Islam says that Jesus is not a Savior, Jesus did not die for sin. He didn't die at all, because a great prophet like him was taken straight to heaven, and people are basically good, so you don't need him to die for you. You just need Islamic law to tell you what to do.

So there are a variety of legalistic gospels. Some are distorted versions of Christianity. Islam is a version of Christianity in some ways: it comes after Christianity, it has a notion of who Jesus is, it has some nice things to say about the biblical writings (although the Quran is correcting the mistakes that slipped in over time into the biblical writings). But Islam is an entire religion that is based on proper behavior putting you in good standing before God. In legalistic religion, rules and rituals supplement or replace Jesus as the way to be right with God.

## *Magical*

Another type of gospel is what I would label a magical gospel. They don't talk about it as magic, but the aim is magical. The goal is not so much to be in a relationship with God. A magical gospel realizes that supernatural powers are real and tries to harness such powers for our benefit. There are techniques to get information from those supernatural powers in order to make profitable decisions, and then to be able to put those supernatural powers to work in your favor.

Some people are seeking supernatural revelations, and some who seek them, get them. Muhammad did. He had a supernatural revelation, he said, from the angel Gabriel, who gave him the content of the Quran straight from heaven. Joseph Smith was into the occult, seeking to make contact with various powers. And he got his wish: he claimed that he received from the angel Moroni certain revelations which became the Book of Mormon.

Some people who fascinated by the occult, by supernatural powers. They have little interest in whether those powers are good powers or evil powers. The important it is getting access to powers of whatever kind, powers that I can harness, that I can control and use for my own benefit. I want results.

Some religions will give you certain meditation techniques for getting in touch with divine power and divine enlightenment. If you achieve that, you're the one who actually discovers and brings it about and makes it happen, and you're doing it for you.

Spiritist religions and the pantheist religions all have a notion that there is a divine power and a supernatural power at work in the world. And a key part to success in life is figuring out how that power works, and then bringing your own practices into line with it, discovering the secrets. There are religious attempts to harness the supernatural for your benefit. The aim is not a relationship with a personal God, but finding ways to control supernatural powers.

Now, of course, the real God, the real Jesus, does have divine, miraculous, supernatural power and does give revelation. He has given his revelation fully in his Word. So it's not false to say that there are real supernatural powers and real supernatural revelation.

But pay very careful attention to what the apostle says to the Galatians: if anybody brings you a different gospel, even if it's an angel from heaven, let him be accursed. Keep in mind that Satan himself appears as an angel of light. The fact that somebody showed up with some sort of angelic shining about him would not guarantee that you were getting the true gospel.

Paul is saying there are religious gospels that will come, and that there may even be angel beings involved. If you know your Bible, you know there are two kinds of angel beings: the holy kind and the fallen kind. Paul says the fallen kind can seem like angels of light, and their servants seem like servants of righteousness.

## *Nationalist*

Other gospels can come in religious form; they can also come in the form of an ideology. That was true in the ancient world as well as today. Even where there was religion and gods and goddesses, the real operative religion was an ideology of nationalism. If you were an Assyrian emperor, the Assyrian gods were the greatest gods around.

If you were a Roman emperor, the Roman gods were the greatest gods around. And even if you had a little disagreement over which god or goddess you preferred the most, it didn't matter. As long as you acknowledged the divine goddess Roma and knew that the Roman emperor was the chief representative of the gods here on earth, whatever other gods you worshiped didn't matter very much as long as you knew that Rome is supreme, that the empire is supreme. Romans told themselves, "Our nation is the greatest that ever existed. Sure, we've conquered everybody else, but what a blessing it was for them to be conquered. What a joy it is for them to be under our thumb. They are lucky!"

Nationalist ideology wasn't just a matter of ancient times and ancient gods and goddesses. When Adolf Hitler came along, there was a whole movement called the German Christians. They would confess in church that Adolf Hitler was the Führer and the divinely appointed leader of the German people. They said God authorized Hitler and the Nazis to advance God's reign on earth.

It can happen in this country when patriotism goes berserk. It can also happen in other nations. Even atheistic nations have other gospels and other forms of worship. You can tell it by the size of the picture of the dear leader covering the side of a large building. You know who they really worship, don't you? It's not any divine or supernatural power; it is that person leading their nation.

## *Progressive*

Unfortunately, nationalism is not the only type of ideology that can become a false gospel. Another is **progressive** ideology. There are some people who don't like their own nation very much, but they know that if their new ideology were in charge, if the revolution and the resistance could just get its way, then we would have heaven on earth. If only we could just demolish all the remnants of the past and start from scratch! Then things would be what they ought to be.

That was the great attempt of the French Revolution. They were going to start the calendar in the year zero, dated by the beginning of the French Revolution, because that was when all things were made new. Shortly after that, they were chopping everybody's heads off. The French Revolution produced the Reign of Terror and the military dictatorship of Napoleon within a couple years, but the revolutionaries thought they would produce heaven on earth!

Progressive ideology aims to demolish the past and start from scratch. That was the dream of the French Revolution and the philosopher Rousseau and his heirs. Karl Marx was one of those heirs: "If you follow my ideology, things are going to turn into a worker's paradise. It will be beautiful. We don't need God, because religion is the opium of people to keep them drugged in

their oppressed state. But if they have their consciousness raised and they realize how oppressed they are, they will rise up and make the world what it ought to be."

Always in these dreams, there are a few people keeping you back from that paradise. They've got to go. You've got to get rid of them. Progressive revolutionaries believe people are basically good except a few that have to be destroyed because they're wrecking everything for everybody else. But the number of people who don't fit the new order always seems to increase, so you need to kill more and more to prepare the way for heaven on earth.

Progressive ideology complains that everything about our society is bad, but if only you replaced it with what the latest progressive ideology is, then you would get heaven on earth. If only we could get social justice instead of oppression. If only we could have sexual liberation. If only we could have marriage equality (which means defining marriage in a way never defined before in the history of the world, but we will redefine marriage equality). We must have "reproductive freedom," which means you don't reproduce, and if you do, you kill the results of reproduction by aborting babies. We're going to have equity. We're going to have climate justice. Now our expert leaders will sit in judgment on climate and change it. What a glorious thing progressive ideology is: to be able to run the weather, to control the climate, to undo human institutions for all of time. Until we progressives came along, the world was messed up, but in recent years, we have figured it all out and know how to fix it. What a glorious thing that is!

You'll find progressive ideology in a couple of forms: atheist or religious. Sometimes it comes in atheist form, where you dispense with belief in God or any supernatural powers, and the ideology is the supreme authority. Marx took that approach, and various forms of socialism have done so.

But oftentimes progressivism comes in religious form, and some churches preach faithfully the doctrines of the progressive revolution. Jesus, wouldn't you know it, was a progressive revolutionary. The Bible was revealing progressivism all along, but only now did we realize it.

So you can have progressive ideology in religious form or in atheistic form, just as you can have a nationalist ideology that demotes everything about God and promotes the rulers, or you can have a nationalist ideology that mobilizes religious groups in the service of the ideology.

### ***What is your biggest danger?***

I trust you're getting the point that other gospels can take various forms. And we need to be especially vigilant about the form that appeals to us the most. What's the biggest danger for you?

If you already dislike rules intensely and don't think much of rituals, you're probably not that endangered by a legalist gospel. But what about magical religion, where you take a more therapeutic approach and you're going to make sure everybody feels good, and you're going to tap into all the powers of God and Spirit to bring about nice things? If you're a very therapeutic person, you might worry about the legalistic gospel, but that's the last thing you need to worry about.

There are some people who cry, “Nationalism is taking over the church,” but meanwhile they're waving their progressive flag all over the place and planting it firmly in the middle of the church. While they warn against the nationalist gospel, they fall for the progressive gospel.

It can happen the other way around too. If you tend to proclaim, “My country, right or wrong. My country’s always correct,” and you worry constantly about the impact of progressive, "woke" ideology on the church, beware. The reason you panic over progressivism might be that you're too enthralled with nationalist ideology.

On the other hand, if you can't stand seeing any flags waved or any patriotic displays, and you want to bring down every statue of leaders from the past, you're not in danger of a nationalistic or a white supremacist ideology. You're in danger of identifying Christianity with a progressive ideology and agenda.

In this message, I could just stick to ancient issues and say, “Scholars have found that here are the type of opponents Paul was opposing back there in Galatia.” That is worthwhile to do and to understand: What’s the original context? What was going on? Who were the Judaizers? Who were those insisting on circumcision and other rites of the Jewish law?

But I don’t think religious legalism is your greatest danger here today. It’s important to understand the original problem, but Paul's warning against other gospels has a wider application. There are going to be different directions that you can chase other gospels besides religious legalism. Our course, that one still is a danger. The success of Islam alone ought to be enough to warn us that religious legalism does have tremendous appeal for hundreds of millions of people.

## **Bewitched**

- Other gospels
- Other Jesus
- Other spirits
- Other apostles

Paul says, “Who has bewitched you?” He warns of other gospels, of another Jesus besides the real Jesus, of other spirits besides the Holy Spirit, and of other apostles besides the apostles appointed by Christ.

### ***Other gospels***

Now, when Paul speaks of other gospels, it's interesting that he puts it that way. The word *gospel* means "good news." Everybody offering a religion or ideology claims to be bringing good news. Back in the day when Paul was writing, one of the most common declarations of a gospel was, “Caesar is Lord.” You would burn a pinch of incense to Caesar to honor the lordship of Caesar. The Roman peace, the prosperity, glory, and wonder that Rome has brought to the whole world—ain’t it wonderful? And so you have that type of gospel.

Often you find that there are slogans, doctrines, and proclamations. Other gospels have missionary zeal. It's not just something that people happen to hold as a private opinion. The other gospels will have very aggressive ambassadors.

Islam had conquered, by the point of the sword, much of the world within a hundred years of Muhammad's appearance on earth.

Jehovah's Witness don't keep their ideas to themselves. They want to spread what they regard as the gospel of Jesus as the highest angel, and of earning your way to God by your good works.

Nationalists have their rallies, noisy and large. It's ever been so. Nebuchadnezzar had his rally, where everybody had to bow down to his idol. But they were really a bowing down to him as the supreme authority.

Progressive gospels emphasize the need to "come out," to make yourself known. "Silence is violence." You have to proclaim the new gospel. You've got to make it known. It's not a private identity; it is a public declaration: "This is the truth. This is my truth, and you need to know my truth. And you really should believe it and embrace it."

We live in the age of social media. If you hold an opinion and it's good news, you want to make it known. So you declare yourself, you declare your opinion. And often you will use a whole set of doctrines and of doctrinal buzzwords.

In progressive ideology, it might be critical theory, identity politics, intersectionality, anti-racism, patriarchy—you know the drill by now. And the converts, within a little while, will be spouting those catchphrases. They'll be proclaiming their individuality, but I can predict what they're going to say before they say it, because I've heard the recitation of their progressive creed from many others. At any rate, their creed must be recited, and the new gospel must be declared. People who are bewitched have these other gospels. They proclaim these other gospels, and they want to give testimony.

### *Other Jesus*

Most religions and ideologies offer another Jesus. Everybody's got to deal with Jesus and say something about him. Religious versions often have him as a great prophet or teacher. Mormonism has something nice to say about Jesus. Jehovah's Witnesses view Jesus as the greatest angel. Islam says Jesus is the third-greatest prophet. Hinduism and Buddhism would say that he's an agent of enlightenment, maybe a high-level bodhisattva, somebody similar to the Buddha who brings you into enlightenment. Jesus is a pretty great guy. So there is another Jesus.

Social progressives portray Jesus as a social revolutionary, as one who upsets the apple cart and changes everything. Even atheists need to say something about Jesus. A minority of atheists will say, "Jesus was deluded and clueless, and he's certainly dead." But even many atheists will try to say something nice about Jesus: "He had some overall good ideas for his time, but unfortunately he got killed. And so we've got to do better in our time."

It seems there's always another Jesus. He won't be the Jesus who is both fully divine and fully human, who gave his life on the cross to pay for the sins of the world, and whose death and resurrection are sufficient for the salvation of everybody who trusts in him. That is not what the other gospels will say about Jesus.

### *Other spirits*

There will also be other spirits. Oftentimes, it's a spirit of self-improvement. And there may even be in some religions an attempt to redefine who the Holy Spirit is. For them, the Spirit isn't a person but a power. In Jehovah's Witness theology, for instance, the Spirit would be just another expression for divine power, certainly not the third person of the Trinity. So you'll have other spirits.

You'll have "new light from the Spirit." You'll find this often in progressive ideology within churches: "You know, the Bible was great in its time. It's done a lot of good. There's still quite a bit of good in it. But the Holy Spirit is bringing fresh light. And in our time, we're seeing things that nobody saw in those previous ages. In the progressive mindset, the Holy Spirit is always doing more on Friday than he did on Thursday, and always saying things on Friday that he wasn't saying on Thursday, because he's a progressive Spirit.

You'll even find an overlap between the more secular progressive ideology and the more religious progressive ideology. I'll take an example: What is the Constitution? It is an ever-evolving document that had some good ideas in it, but will be adjusted a great deal for our time and be more useful if we do so. (Of course, the Constitution is not divinely inspired. But that's an approach to the Constitution as a written document: it's ever-evolving.) Move into the realm of the church, and you'll find that progressives view the Bible much like they view the Constitution: its meaning is ever-evolving. The Spirit is ever revealing new things. Just because something is written in the New Testament and written by an apostle does not mean that it's binding, according to progressives. "Hey, that was a long time ago! Get with it!"

Other spirits will help you feel better about yourself. They won't transform you or make you into the image of Jesus Christ. But there will be a another spirit. Sometimes it's a nationalistic spirit. Sometimes it's an individual therapeutic spirit that your therapist can help you unlock. Sometimes it's a spirit that is totally at odds with your body. That body may have looked like a girl to everybody else, but you know you're not a girl just because you have a girl's body; in spirit you're a boy. Other gospels offer other spirits.

### *Other apostles*

Along with other gospels, other Jesuses, and other spirits, there are always other apostles.

Here's a test of other apostles: What do they say about Paul? Try that one on for size. The "super-apostles" and their followers did not think much of Paul. They said he wasn't as good a speaker as they were. They were better at rhetoric. Is that really the test of truth? They were more entertaining. People liked listening to them. These "other apostles" knew so much better than Paul.

Read progressive theologians today. Most of them cannot stand Paul. They don't like him. They say, "I'm a red-letter Christian. I follow Jesus. Paul introduced things into Christianity that were contrary to Jesus and to the Spirit of Jesus. And isn't it nice that you've got a super-apostle like me, two thousand years later, to tell you what Jesus really meant instead of what that guy Paul said. Why listen to Paul? He merely saw Jesus on the road to Damascus and spent three years in the desert listening to him. What does he know about Jesus? I'll tell you the real Jesus!"

Many who don't like the real gospel hate Paul. If you hear a writer say disparaging things about Paul—*ding ding ding ding*—your alarm should be going off. If they don't like Paul, that's a really bad sign. They're on the wrong track with the gospel.

Some people have said that 1 Peter couldn't have been written by the apostle Peter. Why not? One reason, they say, is that 1 Peter agrees too much with Paul. They say that Peter opposed Paul and couldn't have agreed with Paul.

I've read stuff by Brian McLaren. He used to claim to be an evangelical Christian. Then he trots out a book called *A New Kind of Christianity*. I read it and thought, "That's not new! I read that stuff long ago when I was reading Harnack and those guys from over a hundred years ago, except they were a lot smarter!" This "new kind of Christianity" is the old liberalism that came around in the 1800s and 1900s. It's all the same stuff. The progressives who say it's new must count on their readers to have a short memory. Or maybe they aren't very educated and don't know what liberal theologians 100 or 200 years ago were saying.

Progressive ideology isn't new, and neither is what is sometimes called "modern science." Is it modern science to say, "All of reality is stuff randomly falling through space and then banging into each other and stuff happens!" Really? Modern science? Democritus was saying that kind of stuff 2,500 years ago. He wasn't a scientist, and he's not very modern.

But always, you have these gospels that claim to be something new. "We've got insights nobody ever had before!" They're old, stale ideas that have been tried before and debunked. But we don't know our own history. That's why Satan believes in recycling. He keeps recycling old lies. And his recycling often works because people don't realize that he already used the same claptrap in the past.

Beware of "other apostles." There were legalistic apostles. We mentioned already Muhammad, Joseph Smith, other apostles who came up with religious and legalistic stuff. The "super-apostles" of Paul's day did that sort of thing.

The "other apostle" might be a political leader who's very charismatic and gets everybody thinking that he's the greatest thing and the key to making you great.

Darwin, Marx, Freud, Nietzsche—they were apostles. They've had an enormous influence on people shaped by their ideologies.

Some people say, “We're here to free the oppressed. We are here to promote nothing but love. And if you happen not to agree with us, you will be cancelled immediately. But we love you so much!”

As Paul said, they come as angels of light: light in the sense of presenting new insights, promising a better situation in society, promising good things happening to you personally, and also being winsome in the way they talk. The super-apostles were better talkers than Paul. Super-apostles sometimes sound very smart. And if you don't already recognize the Satanic lies that they're trying to recycle, they'll sound pretty clever.

Be aware that one reason why they sound smart to you is because they're very good at telling you what you want to hear. Today, such "apostles" are more accessible than ever. If you are uncomfortable with the real gospel, if there's something that makes you uneasy or something you don't like about the Bible, you might go looking elsewhere, and you can find it. Go to social media. Go to the internet. If you're not well-informed, the first voice you hear that says what you want to hear is going to sound like an angel of light, because finally you got what you wanted to hear. You believe what you want. It's called confirmation bias. You go searching around until you find somebody who says what you want to hear.

You also can find the community that you want. Not only do you get super-apostles, you get a whole community thrown in. It used to be that you might feel isolated or alone if you held far-out beliefs. Now you get a community. If you have any kind of predilection toward variant sexuality, you can find a community for that. If you identify as the opposite sex, you can find a community for that. If you identify as an animal, you can now find the furry community online. If you have a major eating disorder and somebody's trying to help you to get over that major eating disorder so that you won't die, you can find a community that says, “It's not a disorder. It is a beautiful thing to be anorexic, to be emaciated. There are hundreds of thousands of us, and we are beautiful. Don't you believe it when they tell you there's something amiss about starving yourself.” You can find a community for just about anything. And when it suits your taste, it will sound like an angel of light. We have more access to our favorite personal angel of light than ever before in the history of the race. So be aware of those things.

Christianity is troubling. It says that you're guilty before God, that you've fallen far short of the glory of God, that without God's help you'd be lost forever. You say, “I like to believe nice things about myself. I like to believe that I'm good. I don't want to believe in sin.” Then atheism sounds good to you. If you there is no standard and no God, why worry about it? If you have something that sticks in your craw about Christianity, you can find a different gospel.

Unfortunately, different gospels have a major downside: they're false, and they're deadly. Lies sound good for a while, but reality has a way of breaking through.

Take the ideology of progressivism and socialism, for instance. It sounds great, except when you look at every society in the world that ever tried it, it turned into a hellhole. I don't use that word lightly. It turns into a preliminary version of hell.

Or you say, “Thanks to atheism, I really feel free now. I don’t have to worry about God anymore. I don’t have to worry about anybody telling me I’m a sinner. I feel liberated.” Except now without God you’re a randomly evolved blob of slime. Do you find that to be uplifting? Encouraging? Joy-bringing? When you die, you turn to dirt. When your children die, they turn to dirt. This is the new doctrine that you’ve embraced. Also, those who hate and murder aren’t doing anything more wrong than those who are kind, because it’s just part of random evolution. It’s the way things are.

I’m not going to go into all the detail on all the other gospels. I’d rather talk for a bit about the true gospel. But we do need to be aware of the false ones. If I believed that I should only say the positive stuff all the time, then I would be different than every apostle in the New Testament. They identify false gospels as well as the true gospel.

### **In Christ**

- Gospel of God
- Real Jesus
  - God, man,
  - Cross, ruler, judge
- Holy Spirit
- Biblical apostles

Paul calls it the **Gospel of God** or the gospel of God's grace. It comes from God. It’s revealed by God. It’s accomplished by God. You know you're on the wrong track with your gospel if it tells you that you're going to make your way up the ladder to God. The true gospel says God comes down to us, according to the divine wisdom and plan, according to his power, his grace. It comes from him. It exalts him. Any gospel that makes you big and God little—you know it’s false. Any gospel that makes God big and you littler has a good chance of being on the right track.

The true gospel introduces you to the **real Jesus**. The apostle says, “The thing that I'm really concerned about isn’t that you're not listening to me, but I introduced you to Christ. I betrothed you to Christ.” Everything about the gospel connects you with Christ. If Christ becomes a footnote and some other agenda is at the center, then you know that it’s a gospel gone wrong.

The real Jesus is God become human for our salvation. The gospel makes much of the cross, of Jesus crucified, of his blood. If you can sit in a church for years and years, or if you can read through a book and it never mentions the blood of Christ, the atonement of Christ, the payment for sin, you’ve got a false gospel. Slam that book shut. Get out of that church. If it doesn’t make much of Christ and of his cross, then it’s a false gospel. If it doesn’t mention Jesus as ruler, as the one who commands and directs our lives, it’s a false gospel. If it doesn’t mention that Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead, it’s a false gospel.

The real gospel introduces you to the real Jesus and brings you into union with the Lord Jesus Christ through the power of the **Holy Spirit**. The false gospels have other spirits. But the true gospel brings introduces you—and in fact fills you—with the Spirit of truth, the Spirit of holiness, the Spirit who transforms you more and more to be like the Lord Jesus Christ and gives

you more and more of the fruit of the Spirit. In Christ and in union with him, there is the Holy Spirit of God who's making this difference.

The true gospel depends on the **biblical apostles**, not the super-apostles, not the people who are smarter two thousand years later than the apostles who personally knew Jesus Christ and received the gospel directly from him and witnessed him crucified, saw the risen Christ. The apostles, the biblical writers, are people that you can count on. Those who claim to have improved on the Bible, a book called *A New Kind of Christianity*, just through it in the fire before you even open it. If it's new, it isn't true. If it's true, it isn't new. Okay? That's the gospel. The gospel is not recently invented by some guy who didn't really like the apostle Paul very much.

### **Centered in Christ**

We need to hold to the true gospel. Here are just a few of the statements that Paul makes in Galatians, as the letter unfolds, to keep us oriented and keep us centered in Christ.

“A person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:16). You're not made right with God by your effort or by keeping rules. You're made right with God by trusting Jesus Christ: his blood to pay for your sins, his perfect righteousness credited to you and accepted by God.

The apostle goes on to say: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing” (Galatians 2:20–21).

Wouldn't it be horrible to say that Christ died for nothing? The whole religion of Islam can be summarized by the sentence “Righteousness can be gained by the works of the law.” It can be gained by sharia obedience, by doing what Muhammad and the Quran say. That's how you gain righteousness. People are basically good, and they just have to be told what to do: that is the summary of Islamic doctrine. But Muslims don't say, “Christ died for nothing.” They say he didn't die at all. Do you see how Islam flips the whole gospel upside down? You don't need the death of Jesus. You just need a law given to you, and then do what it says and you're good to go.

Trust in Christ crucified. That is what it's all about. And then experience that “Christ lives in me.” Christianity is the life of God, the life of Christ, within the human spirit. If you have an ideology or a gospel that does not bring you to the living Christ dwelling inside you by his Holy Spirit and living in union with him, it's a false gospel.

That's why Paul asks that question: “How did you get the Spirit in the first place?” You received the Spirit when you put your faith in Jesus Christ. When you trusted him, he gave you his Spirit. If you started with Christ, are you going to go back to some other means of being saved and some other means of receiving the Spirit? (See Galatians 3:2-3.) There is no other means of receiving the Holy Spirit of Christ.

## One in Christ Jesus

Then Paul makes this statement: “In Christ Jesus, you are all sons of God through faith, for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26–28). What’s your identity? You are in Christ. Sure, you’re also a woman or a man; that’s a fact about you. But that is not the main fact of your identity. Are you at the top of society, among the one percent? Are you at the bottom of society, a wage slave? Who cares? You’re in Christ. That’s the main thing. This is not to say that disparities don’t matter. It’s not to say there’s no difference between male and female. It is to say that your identity and the core of who you are is in Christ, or you haven’t understood the gospel yet.

Some theorists and activists say, “We can separate out people into this category and into that category. We can separate them into male and female, and the males are always the oppressors, and the women are always the oppressed. This race is the oppressor race, that race is the non-oppressed race. This is the economically advantaged group, and that’s the economically disadvantaged group.” There’s no denying that there are group differences and problems in society, but if you’re emphasizing those divides as the main thing—and some churches do—then you’re forgetting the centrality of the Lord Jesus Christ.

On the flip side, I will just add that when people do belong to Christ, and men are predators or are cruel to women, or women are being mistreated, you don’t say, “Hey, we’re all one in Christ. It doesn’t matter if you’re male or female.” When there are some groups of people who are being mistreated terribly and somebody stands up for them, don’t right away say, “They’re betraying the gospel because they want justice.” The gospel calls for fair treatment of people. There’s no doubt about that.

So we have to be careful about jumping to judgment because we’re triggered by certain uses of words. If somebody doesn’t use our exact vocabulary, we might blurt, “Now we know that it’s a false gospel.” I’ll warn you right now: some of the heretics and false gospels will stick with Christian vocabulary. They’ll still talk about Jesus. They may even use the word “Trinity” here and there. They’ll use a lot of the lingo of Christianity but give it a different content.

On the other hand, there may be people who use a buzzword from another movement that you don’t happen to like, but they’re still orthodox Christians. The test is: do they believe in Jesus as God and man? Do they believe in the cross and in the blood atonement? Do they believe in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit? Do they believe in the authority of the Bible? Even if you think they have an incorrect opinion on this or that, we are one in Christ Jesus, if we hold to those cardinal, central truths of being in Christ.

So we want to be aware of the danger of false gospels. We also want to be aware of the danger of unnecessary separation from fellow Christians who believe the true gospel. The apostle deals with that in Galatians 2, where Peter and Barnabas and some others were separating from fellow Christians over certain things, and Paul rebuked them because they weren’t acting in line with the truth of the gospel.

It's a very challenging thing. We need the help of God. We need to be able to identify and resist and reject false gospels. And we need, by God's grace, not to dismiss or depart from or reject people who hold to the true gospel but have a different opinion from us on a secondary matter. The apostle wrote these words to the Galatians and to the Corinthians because he wanted them to be one with Christ and to be one with each other in Christ. So may God give us the grace to be faithful to that gospel and to be connected with those who share in that same gospel.

### **Prayer**

Thank you, Father, for again and again reminding us what the true gospel is, for calling us again to be alert to those who are false apostles and doing that work of Satan, who appears as an angel of light. Lord, we're going to get fooled if you aren't helping us by your Holy Spirit and if you're not correcting us by your Word. So help us hear this Word and understand what it's saying to us in our own situation. Defend your flock from those who would deceive your sheep. Where there are wolves in sheep's clothing, tear away the disguise so that false teaching may be recognized.

We pray also, Lord, that we may recognize those who truly belong to you. May the barriers that needlessly divide believers from each other be removed so that we may be truly one in heart and mind with each other and with you, our Lord and Savior. Give us the discernment and the wisdom to be able to follow your path. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

## **Other Gospels**

### **By David Feddes**

#### **Slide Contents**

<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— <sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. <sup>10</sup> For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. <sup>11</sup> For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. <sup>12</sup> For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:6-12)

<sup>3:1</sup> You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Have you experienced so much in vain—if it really was in vain? <sup>5</sup> So again I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you heard? (Galatians 3:1-5)

<sup>11:2</sup> For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. <sup>3</sup> I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. <sup>4</sup> For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. <sup>5</sup> Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles... <sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> So it is no surprise if his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds. (2 Corinthians 11:2-5, 13-15)

#### **Other gospels**

- **Religion**
  - Legalist
  - Magical
- **Ideology**
  - Nationalist
  - Progressive

## **Bewitched**

- Other gospels
- Other Jesus
- Other spirits
- Other apostles

## **In Christ**

- Gospel of God
- Real Jesus
  - God, man,
  - Cross, ruler, judge
- Holy Spirit
- Biblical apostles

## **Faith in Christ Jesus**

A person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16)

## **Christ lives in me**

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing! (Gal 2:20-21)

## **One in Christ Jesus**

In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)