

## **Getting the Gospel Right**

Scripture: Galatians 1

Code: 48-1

Beginning this morning, at least in an introductory way, we're going to launch into a study of the epistle to the Galatians by the great apostle Paul. It is a very suitable epistle for us to be considering at this particular time in our own lives, as well as in the life of the church and evangelical Christianity, as we look at its current condition. This is a powerful, clear proclamation of the gospel and its implications.

The apostle Paul obviously is the great New Testament apostle given the responsibility for clarifying the gospel in its most careful way; thus, he has written all his epistles, which in one way or another enrich our understanding of the life and ministry, death and resurrection, ascension and return of our Lord Jesus Christ, all of which encompasses the glory of the good news. It's going to be important for us to understand the gospel as its revealed through the Holy Spirit in the letters of Paul, and most particularly the book of Galatians.

But beyond that, and in a general sense, Galatians had a very strong impact on the Reformation. This is the year 2017. Five hundred years ago 1517 a monk, an Augustinian monk and priest by the name of Martin Luther, launched the Protestant Reformation. He did that by writing up 95 theses, all of which condemned some practice in the Roman Catholic system. He posted those 95 condemning theses on the door of the Roman Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany; and with the posting of that launched essentially the Reformation. That was the first shot fired and eventually heard around the world.

He saw what was wrong with the Roman Catholic Church. And, in particular, when he came to Galatians chapter 3, and verse 11, and the words, "The just" – or the righteous – "shall live by faith," he understood for the first time the true gospel.

That statement, of course, drawn out of the Old Testament, Habakkuk 2:4. Paul refers to it in Romans 1:17. It is referred to here in Galatians 3:11; and again, a third time in the New Testament in Hebrews 10:38. A very critical statement: "The just shall live" – or the righteous – "shall live by faith." That launched Luther's understanding of the gospel, brought about his salvation, and gave force and power to his ministry as God used him as a key part of the great recovery of the gospel known as the Reformation. But let's back up a little bit.

Before Luther was a clear-headed theologian, he was a confused monk. Before he was a powerful force, he was a tormented failure. Before he had spiritual peace, he lived in constant spiritual pain. Luther was depressed. He was profoundly depressed. He was so depressed, so overwrought with guilt that he lived with constant anxiety and fear.

On one occasion when he was still pursuing a career as a professor of Law, he encountered a thunderstorm, and a bolt of lightning hit the ground very near to him. It terrified him to the degree that at that moment he committed himself to God to become a monk, believing that maybe that was

the lightening from God that would come again and take his life if he didn't devote himself to God. He became an Augustinian monk and moved into an Augustinian monastery.

In the monastery he found the road to salvation was very hard, very hard. In fact, it was not just hard for him, it was hard for everyone. It was so hard that the Catholic Church invented a place called purgatory, and the purpose of purgatory was to purge the remaining sins of certain people who were too bad to go to heaven, but too good to go to hell. And there seemed to have been a lot of people too bad for heaven and too good for hell who needed some purging, and that was what happened supposedly in purgatory.

I suppose the best that Luther could have hoped for was purgatory, because no matter what he did he never ever got over the reality of his own sinfulness. He was tortured on the inside by guilt and fear. Monks so feared God and the wrath of God, so feared Christ and the just throne of Christ and judgment of Christ that they turned to Mary. Mary, they were taught, was more compassionate than either the Father or the Son; and they would go to her, pleading with her to plead with Christ and plead with God on their behalf, to grant them salvation. In Luther's case, he knew he did not deserve.

Luther was terrified of God and terrified of Christ. Luther was taught like all monks, that salvation is by grace, but you have to earn that grace. In other words, you have to reach a certain point of worthiness. You have to have accumulated a certain amount of merit, and if you are worthy enough, God will give you grace. So in order to become worthy, Luther went to the very extremes as the apostle Paul said he did in the chapter that I read. Luther gave himself over to every conceivable and inconceivable severe discipline. He renounced all self-will. He was told that if his food was meager that was a way to the worthiness that God desired; and so with the rest of the monks they ate basically a meager bread and water kind of diet.

They were also told that if they struggled with uncomfortable clothing and some other additional things in their shoes and around their waists that inflicted pain, that too could accumulate some worthiness for them. So he gave himself to meager food, he gave himself to the denial of self-will, he gave himself to uncomfortable clothing. He gave himself to sleepless vigils that went on and on and on. He gave himself to begging, which was the most humiliating thing a human being could do. And even though they didn't need to beg, they begged because they thought that somehow could attain worthiness that would qualify them to receive grace. He fasted so often that his friends were afraid he was going to die.

He knew that he didn't have the merit that he needed, and so he did what Roman Catholics were told to do, he applied for some merit that was available to him that could be passed down to him from somebody else. This is how it worked: some people died with more merit than they needed. Excess merit was accumulated in what the Catholic Church calls the treasury of merit, and it sits there in an available place for you to tap into, and you can receive that merit that was more than somebody needed; but what you need, it can be applied to your case. And here's how: if you commit yourself to visiting and venerating relics like imaginary bones of Peter, pieces of the cross, milk from the breast of Mary, blood of the martyrs.

He walked 800 miles to Rome and 800 miles back, and when he got to Rome he went there to ascend the Scala Sancta, the holy steps which were supposed to be the steps that our Lord went up into Pilate's judgment hall that were transported to Rome, and sinners could gain merit if they crawled up those steps and knelt at every step, bowed down, kissed the step, and progressed all

the way to the top. After having done that and been exposed to Rome, he saw more corruption than he had ever seen in his experience as a monk in Wittenberg, or anywhere else in Germany. He was so overwrought by sin that he would confess his sins incessantly, up to six hours. He confessed them to his priestly confessor, a man by the name of Staupitz; and Staupitz was so worn out by these long confessions that he said to Luther, "Do not come back unless you commit adultery or fornication. Stop with the endless confessions."

He had no peace; he had no salvation. What was driving Luther to this level of terror and fear was he desperately wanted to be right with God, because he understood God, and God's wrath, and God's judgment, and the reality of eternal punishment in hell. You could say it this way: he had fear of God. The fear of God is a necessary truth to drive sinners to seek reconciliation. Where there is no fear of God, sinners go blindly and blithely to hell. And, naturally, Romans 3 says there is no fear of God before their eyes.

That's not natural. Pride is natural. Sinners have to be taught to fear God; and that, for sure, the Roman Catholic Church did. Luther was so afraid of God that it tortured him. He wanted God to forgive him; he wanted God to accept him. He wanted to escape hell; he wanted to enter heaven. And even as a monk in an Augustinian monastery doing everything he could possibly do, he could not satisfy his own heart and find relief for his fear and guilt. He inflicted extreme torment on his soul and body.

Here's a quote from Martin Luther: "I tortured myself with praying, fasting, keeping vigils, and freezing. The cold was enough to kill me. I inflicted such pain as I would never inflict again." All of this self-imposed torture, along with his sacraments, pilgrimages, and other deprivations, gave him no peace, no rest, and no sense of forgiveness; they only increased the torment. He was doing everything he could do, and God was not responding. He knew that he was by nature and behavior a sinner, and that God was by nature and behavior absolutely holy, and the gulf was infinite, and he could not cross that gulf, and he left to himself could not satisfy God. In fact, Luther was convinced that it was impossible for any sinner to satisfy God and be accepted by God. So he began to feel that God was cruel, brutally cruel, and he actually came to hate God. Let me read you what wrote.

Here's a quote from Martin Luther: "I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners; and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and I said, 'Is it not enough that miserable sinners eternally lost through original sin are crushed by the law of the Ten Commandments without having God add pain to pain by the gospel, and also by the gospel threatening us with His righteous wrath?'" And then Luther said, "I raged against God with fierce and troubled conscience."

One wonders where such raging is in the shallows of contemporary Christianity. Where is such raging? Where is such fear of God and holy wrath? The shallows of contemporary Christianity with its false gospels generate no such raging, because they generate no such fear.

Martin Luther though would have found a companion, a companion in the Bible, another man who was in the very position he was in. He was literally being racked by fear and guilt and anxiety and dread, and didn't know how to be right with God. Who was that? Turn back to the book of Job, the book of Job; probably the first book of the Bible ever written, written even before Moses wrote the first five books from Genesis on. All the way back at the beginning, as man begins to face God, there is a compelling question on his mind.

It's in Job 9 and verse 2: "How can a man be in the right before God? How can man be right with God?" That was Luther's question, and that was Job's question, and that – listen – is the question that every religion in the world attempts to answer. All religion assumes a deity, and all religion assumes a means by which you can pacify that deity and move from being harmed by him to being blessed by him.

That's what religion is. All religion proports to offer an answer to the question: "How can a man be made right before God?" And, I might add, all religion gives hell's answer. Only the gospel gives the true answer. But that is the question: "How can a man be in the right before God?" "How can I be right with God?" That was Job's question.

Job, you remember was a good man. He was the best that a man actually can be. In fact, in chapter 1, we read that he was, in verse 1, "blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil." That's as good as it gets on a human level. "He was blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil," and it repeats exactly the same thing in chapter 1, verse 8. This is a man who is a good as it gets. This is a good man from a human viewpoint.

Why is he asking a question in chapter 9, verse 2: "How can a man be made right with God?" Because a good man, an upright, blameless man, a man that people look at and say, "Wow, his life is all that it should be," very much like the apostle Paul, who if measured by the law was blameless, how can a man be a good man and not be right with God? Answer: because being a good man doesn't make you right with God, because you can't be good enough.

Well, Job needed to understand that. Job then, a good man, a good man, has all his children die, loses all his fortune, all his land and crops and animals, all becomes a waste. He loses his health, he's sick, all his sons and daughters have died, everything he had is gone, he's a physical wreck, and he's saying, "God, I'm doing my best to be the best I can be. What is happening here? What's causing this? I don't know what to do."

Chapter 7, verse 3, he says it's day and night, "Nights of trouble are appointed me. When I lie down I say, 'When shall I arise?' But the night continues, and I'm continually tossing until dawn. I can't sleep. Life is torturous. My flesh is clothed with worms and a crust of dirt. My skin hardens and runs. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to an end without hope. Remember" – he says to the Lord – "my life is but breath; my eye will not again see good. The eye of him who sees me will behold me no longer; Your eyes will be on me, but I will not be. I'm losing it, I'm going out of existence, I'm going to die under this. I'm going to be gone."

And so he says, in verse 11, "Therefore I will not restrain my mouth; I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul." And his complaint is, "God, what are You doing? I'm the best a man can be. What's happening? Am I the sea, or the sea monster, that You set a guard of me? Am I dangerous to people? If I say, 'My bed will comfort me, my couch will easy my complaint,' then You frighten me with dreams and terrify me by visions; so that my soul would choose suffocation, death rather than my pains. I waste away; I will not live forever. Leave me alone, my days are but a breath.

"What is man that You magnify him? Why am I this big a deal to You that you're concerned about

him, that You examine him every morning and try him every moment? Will You never turn Your gaze away from me? Can't You go look at somebody else, nor let me alone when I swallow my spittle? Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me as Your target, so that I am a burden to myself? Why then do You not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity? For now I will lie down in the dust. I'm going to die, and You'll seek me, and I'm not going to be there." This is profound confusion and agony, very much like Luther.

Then in chapter 8, one of his useless friends shows up: Bildad the Shuhite, which makes him the shortest man in the Bible. He gives him – some of you are a little slow. "Bildad the Shuhite answers," – now he's going to give him some advice; he's going to give him worldly counsel – 'How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a might wind? How long are you going to keep this up? How long are you going to keep saying this to God complaining? Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert what is right?

"If your sons sinned against Him, then He delivered them into the power of their transgression. He killed them all because they sinned. This is what God does. God doesn't pervert justice. God doesn't pervert what's right, He does what's right. If you would seek God and implore the compassion of the Almighty," – and here it comes; here's the answer of all religion – "if you are pure and upright, surely now He would rouse Himself for you and restore your righteous estate. You just have to be good enough." That is the answer of all religion.

Down in verse 20, Bildad goes on to say, "Lo, God will not reject a man of integrity, nor will He support the evildoers. He will yet fill your mouth with laughter and your lips with shouting." All you have to do is be upright, blameless, pure, righteous. That is the answer of all religion: Be a good person.

And Job answers in chapter 9: "In truth I know that this is so. I know God is just and righteous. I know it's important that I be blameless; I know that. But even so, how can a man be in the right before God? I've done everything I know and it hasn't happened. God has not forgiven me. God has not accepted me. What am I going to do," – he says, "argue with Him? If one wished to dispute with Him, he couldn't answer Him once in a thousand times. I can't argue with God; I'm no match. Wise in heart, God is mighty in strength, who has defied Him without harm?

"Look, it is God who removes the mountains, they know not how, when He overturns them in His anger. It is God who shakes the earth out of its place, and its pillars tremble. It is God who commands the sun to shine, sets a seal on the stars. It is God who stretches out the heavens, tramples down the waves of the sea. It's God who made the constellations: the Bear, the Orion, the Pleiades, and the chambers of the south. God who does great things, unfathomable, wondrous works without number.

"Were he to pass by me, I wouldn't see Him. Were He to move past me, I wouldn't perceive Him. Were He to snatch away, who could restrain Him? Who could say to Him, 'What are You doing?' I don't even know where He is. I don't know when He comes and goes. I'm no match for Him. How can I possibly find out how to be right with Him?

"God will not turn back His anger; beneath Him crouch the helpers of Rahab," – some kind of a great beast. "How can I answer Him, and choose my words before Him? Though I were right, I couldn't

answer; I would have to implore the mercy of my judge. If I called and He answered me, I couldn't believe that He was listening to my voice. For He bruises me with a tempest and multiplies by wounds without cause. He will not allow me to get my breath, but saturates me with bitterness. If it is a matter of power, behold, He's the strong one! If it's a matter of justice, who can summon Him? Though I am righteous, my mouth will condemn me; though I am guiltless, He will declare me guilty. In other words, in my eyes I'm righteous, in my eyes I'm not guilty, but in His I am.

"What am I going to do to be right with God? My days are slipping by;" – verse 25 – "what is my future? How can a man be right with God?" This kind of angst, this kind of fear, this kind of dread comes to the heart of one who fears God, who fears judgment, who fears wrath. That is the missing proclamation in the church today, and so sinners live with a deception. They constantly hear, "God loves you unconditionally." You're headed for God's eternal wrath unless you are reconciled to Him.

Job's question is the original statement of the issue of all religion: "How can a person be right with God?" And Bildad gives the answer that everybody in other religions gives: "You just need to be better; you just need to be blameless. You need to be more righteous, have more integrity." It's the question the psalmist asked in Psalm 130, verse 3, "Since You, Lord, mark iniquities, since you keep a record of iniquities, who can stand?" Or Psalm 143:2, "In Your sight no man living is righteous."

The prophet Isaiah grapples with this question in the 64th chapter of Isaiah. Listen to verses 6 and 7: "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment; all of us wither like a lead, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls on Your name, who arouses himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us and have delivered us into the power of our iniquities."

Micah the prophet, in chapter 6, says, "With what shall I come before the Lord and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings? Shall I come with yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, in ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?" In other words, "Shall I burn my babies like the worshipers of Molech?"

"How can I be righteous before God?" That is the pleading cry of psalmists, and prophets, and Job, and Martin Luther. "How can I escape guilt? How can I escape death? How can I escape eternal punishment? How can I receive eternal life and heaven?" All religion gives the wrong answer: "Be good. Be better. Go about to establish your own righteousness."

Paul faced that in Romans 10: "They don't know about God's righteousness, so they seek to establish their own righteousness rather than subjecting themselves to the righteousness of God, which is available to them" – he says – "through Christ who is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes." It doesn't come by working, it comes by believing in Christ who puts an end to the tyranny of the law.

That's Paul's gospel, and that's what Luther found when he was teaching Galatians. So in reality there are only two possible options to acceptance with God. There is, what Jesus called, the narrow way and the broad way: they both say heaven, they both don't go there. The narrow way is the way of the gospel, the way of grace, the way of faith, and it leads to life. The broad road is the way of works and religion; and it says heaven, but it goes directly to hell. There's no salvation apart from

belief in the true gospel. All other messages, all other religions, all other gospels are demonic deceptions, Satanic religions in one form or another.

Now to say that the gospel is the only way of salvation, to say what Paul did in Galatians 1, that “if anybody preaches another gospel, let him be *anathema*, accursed, damned forever,” to speak in that kind of narrow language is not a popular perspective. The Roman Catholic Church doesn’t even like that, so they have developed what they have called natural theology. And the Roman Catholic Church says people without the Bible, without the gospel, without any knowledge of Christ will show up in heaven and the kingdom of God. They will be reconciled to God. They will be forgiven and given eternal life. On the basis of what?

According to the Second Vatican Council interpreted by the pope, he said this: “Those who live in accordance with the beatitudes and who bear lovingly the sufferings of life will enter the kingdom of God.” So if you’re poor, and humble, and mourning, and suffering, without the Bible, without the gospel, without Christ, you’re going to be in the kingdom of God. That’s what they call natural theology. In other words, there’s a natural way to God if you behave in a certain moral configuration.

Protestants came along and they have another idea, and they call it wider mercy, and they say that God’s mercy is wider than just Christianity; it’s wider than just the gospel. One writer said, “God has more going on by way of redemption than what happened in first century Palestine.” Really? God has more going on by way of redemption than what happened in first century Palestine? In other words, what this writer wants us to believe – and he once called himself an evangelical – is that God saves through all different religions.

Raimon Panikkar wrote a book called *The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*. In that book he said this: “It is through the sacrament of Hinduism that Christ saves.” Really? That’s just one illustration.

So you see it in sort of classic Catholicism in the natural theology idea. You see it in Protestantism in the wider mercy that God’s salvation is not limited to just the gospel. And even in evangelicalism, there is what is now being called the new perspective on Paul. The primary influence of that is coming from a man named N. T. Wright who is a British theologian. He’s written hundreds of pages, hundreds of pages on the gospel, including a very thick book on the resurrection of Christ.

I have read books for years, as you would expect and you would know, and I have read his writings, and they are a mass of confusing ambiguity, contradiction, and obfuscation – academic sleight of hand. I cannot tell you what he believes after reading all of that, but I can tell you exactly what he does not believe. The only time he gets explicit is to make sure we know what he does not believe.

Let me quote a new book by him, N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*. Here is a quote: “We have paganized our understanding of salvation, substituting the idea of God killing Jesus to satisfy His wrath for the genuinely biblical notion we are about to explore.” So he calls Jesus becoming the substitute that God killed to satisfy His wrath for us paganism.

Further, he says, that “Christ died in the place of sinners is closer to the pagan idea of an angry deity being pacified by a human death than it is to anything in either Israel’s Scriptures or the New Testament.” So he rejects substitutionary atonement. He rejects Jesus as the sacrifice that God chose to die for our sins.

He is very clear on what he rejects: he rejects the idea that our sins are imputed to Christ, he rejects the idea that his righteousness is imputed to us. "This is not the gospel," – he says – "this is paganism. To worship God as one who justifies by imputation" – he says – "is nonsense."

I quote: "If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatsoever to say that the judge imputes, imparts, bequeaths, conveys, or otherwise transfers his righteousness to either the plaintiff or the defendant. Righteousness is not an object, a substance, or a gas which can be passed across the courtroom. This gives the impression of a legal transaction, a cold piece of business, almost a trick of thought performed by a God who is logical and correct, but hardly one we want to worship."

He goes on to say, "No one will be justified until he reaches heaven." Further, he said, "I must stress again that the doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by the gospel. The gospel is not an account of how people get saved." Really?

First Corinthians 15:1 and 2, "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel by which you are saved." N. T. Wright is N. T. Wrong. And all who accept his high-sounding words raised up against the true knowledge of God are still in the state of Luther, but without the fear; and if you're without the fear, you're going to hell happily.

What amazes me is that people can do this and have no fear, and propagate it; and many, many young men, evangelical young men in seminary and training, are influenced by Wright to believe the wrong thing. To be propagating a false gospel and denying the true gospel and have absolutely no fear, and no angst, and no guilt, and no dread, and no terror, and no torture is to be void of the work of the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin and righteousness and judgment. The good news about Martin Luther was the Spirit was at work in his soul. But it was the knowledge of the revelation of God as a righteous judge, and the wrath of God from Scripture that was activated in his soul to cause him to fear until he found the truth.

What doesn't exist today in the church is that fear. Where are the terrified people? Where are the terrorized sinners? Where is the angst? Where is the dread? To propagate a false gospel and feel nothing but pride is to be in the most dangerous place possible. To have no interest in the true doctrine of justification, but to be a happy heretic, and an ambiguous one at that, is to be in a place of the most grave spiritual danger, and to make yourself an equally grave danger to those who follow your influence.

No, Luther had been exposed to the wrath of God on the pages of Scripture, and he knew his heart was evil, and his behavior as well. But he just wanted to know how to be right with God like Job did. And he began to teach the book of Romans. Romans 1:17, "The just shall live by faith." And he began to teach the book of Galatians, chapter 3, verse 11: "The just shall live by faith." And when he was in Galatians, the light dawned on him, and he realized that salvation is not by works, it's not by merit, it's by grace through faith alone; and that the just lives by faith, and that the righteousness of God is imputed to the believing sinner.

And when the gospel broke on his soul the Holy Spirit gave him life, and peace and joy flooded him. He was forgiven, he was accepted, he was reconciled, he was converted, he was adopted, he was justified solely by grace through faith, and he wrote this: "Through faith in Christ, therefore, Christ's

righteousness becomes our own righteousness, and all that He has becomes ours; rather He Himself becomes ours. He who trusts in Christ exists in Christ. He is one with Christ, the same as He.” Galatians 2:20, “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me.”

Look, the issue of the gospel was not settled 500 years ago, it was settled over 2,000 years ago. It was settled in the book of Galatians, and Romans, and the rest of the Scripture. It was settled, and it was clear that “salvation” – as the apostle Paul describes it in Romans 3:21, listen – “is apart from the law. It is witnessed by the Law and the Prophets.”

It’s the same salvation given testimony to in the Old Testament. It is the righteousness of God that comes to the sinner through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe. “They are justified” – verse 24 – “as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” Salvation is by grace through faith, and the righteousness of God is imputed to the sinner who believes.

Righteousness is not by the law. Galatians 3:21 says that. It’s not by the law. And on that verse Luther wrote this in his commentary on Galatians: “Here Paul is saying that no law of itself is able to give life, it only kills. Such works as are done, even according to God’s own law, do not justify us before God. They make us sinners. They do not pacify the wrath of God, they kindle it. They do not obtain righteousness, but hinder it. They do not give live, but kill and destroy. The law in itself does not justify, but has the opposite effects.”

Galatians 3:10 says, “As many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse.” Luther discovered that, and then he discovered the glories of the gospel, the blessed gospel of grace and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the gospel, the gospel.

How can a man be right with God? How? By the righteousness of God being given to him by faith in Christ. How non-negotiable is this gospel? Go back to Galatians 1. How non-negotiable is this gospel? Verse 6: “I’m amazed that you’re so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another;” – because there isn’t another; all the rest is not good news, it’s bad news – “only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”

So you have a different gospel in verse 6, or a distorted gospel in verse 7. And then he says, “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be *anathema*! And say it again: if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be damned, *anathema*, cursed!”

This was on the apostle’s mind in the 11th chapter of 2 Corinthians, verse 2: “I’m jealous for you with a godly jealousy; I betrothed you to one husband, so as to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin. I’m afraid” – he says in 11:3 – “that as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we’ve not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you’ve not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully.”

What an indictment. Somebody comes with a different Jesus, a different Holy Spirit, and a different gospel, and you bear it beautifully, you welcome them. This is frightening. Whatever form of corrupted gospel – the gospel of works, the prosperity gospel, gospel of natural theology, the gospel

of wider mercy, the new perspective on Paul, whatever you want to call it – another gospel is not to be borne beautifully. Accursed is to be pronounced on another gospel.

I want to close by having you look at Revelation chapter 5; and here's the final word on the exclusivity of the gospel. Let's go to heaven and find out which gospel is being celebrated in heaven. There's only one heaven. What gospel is heaven celebrating? Are they celebrating any gospel of works, human merit?

Revelation chapter 5, John sees the throne, verse 6: "There is the Lamb standing. The Lamb steps forward, takes the title deed to the universe out of the hand of God on the throne, and praise begins. The four living creatures, who are angelic beings, twenty-four elders representing the glorified church, fell down before the Lamb – the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lamb – with harps, golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song." Now you're going to find out which gospel is being celebrated in heaven. "Worthy are You to take the book and break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

How do we come into God's presence? We were bought by the blood of Jesus Christ. That is the substitutionary blood atonement of Christ. By that, "God has made them to be a kingdom and priest to our God; they will reign on the earth. And I looked," – John says – "I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, the elders. The number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.' And every created thing in heaven, on earth, under the earth, on the sea, all things in them, I heard saying, 'To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.' And the four living creatures" – representing the angels – "kept saying, 'Amen.' And the elders" – representing the redeemed believers – "fell down and worshiped."

All of heaven's worship goes toward the Lamb who shed His blood. That is the only gospel celebrated in heaven. This is the gospel that Paul proclaims and defends.

Father, we are again so grateful that You have called us to Yourself, that You have given us life for our death, light for our darkness, sight for our blindness, knowledge for our ignorance, truth for our deceit. We're thankful, Lord, so thankful that we have become permanent everlasting worshipers of You, the one who granted us this glorious unmerited and undeserved salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. We thank You for our Savior, we thank You for His sacrifice, and we thank You for the gift of eternal life in Him.

O Lord, I pray that there would be no one walk out of this room today who has not understood the terrifying reality of being under the wrath of God, appointed to everlasting wrath and punishment, and who will walk away, turning his or her back on grace and forgiveness and joy and peace and everlasting love and salvation that comes to those who repent of their sin, and even the sin of self-righteousness, and cast themselves on Your grace by putting their trust in Your Son, the only Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

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