

October 29th, 2017

# THE CHRISTIAN DUTY OF INTOLERANCE: 500 YEARS OF PROTEST

Galatians 1:1-9

Two days from now marks the very day when five hundred years ago Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenburg, sparking a debate, which enflamed a revival, which engulfed the globe in a revolution known as the Protestant Reformation. Aside from the the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the birth of the church at pentecost, the Reformation is the single most important event in the last two thousand years.

The parallels between Luther's experience in Germany and Paul's experience in Galatia are striking. Anthony Selvaggio notes:

“Like Luther, the people in his parish had been instructed [by Rome] to strive for justification by means of an external system administered under the authority of the church. This external system focused on participating in the sacraments of the church, performing meritorious deeds, trusting in the power of holy relics, and purchasing indulgences.”<sup>1</sup>

This is what was happening in Galatia after Paul had left those churches. False brothers had snuck in and began teaching that in addition to faith in Jesus Christ you must be circumcised in order to be justified before God.

For Rome it was indulgences and sacraments that helped to justify believers; for the false brothers at Galatia it was circumcision and Jewish ceremonies. The specifics are different but at the core these two events separated by fifteen hundred years are identical: where does your righteousness come from? For Rome, for Galatia it was **performance righteousness**. Adherence to the law, to a code, to a system, “If I do this, then God will accept me as righteous in His sight.” For Paul, for Luther it was **passive**

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony T. Selvaggio, *Meet Martin Luther, A Sketch of the Reformer's Life*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017), pg. 38

**righteousness.** The very righteousness of Christ received by faith alone. Luther said that

“the most excellent righteousness of faith, which God through Christ, without any works, imputeth to us, is...not ceremonial, nor the righteousness of God’s law, nor consisteth of works, but is clean contrary to these; that is to say, it is a *mere passive righteousness*, we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, **but we only receive**, and **suffer Another to work in us**, that is to say, God...Why, do we then *nothing*? Do we work *nothing* for the obtaining of this righteousness? I answer, Nothing at all. For this is perfect righteousness, to do nothing, to hear nothing, to know nothing of the law, or of works, **but to know and believe this only**... Although I am a sinner by the law, and under the condemnation of the law, yet I despair not, yet I die not, because Christ liveth, who is both my righteousness and my everlasting life...I have another righteousness and life, above this life, which is Christ the Son of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul wrote Galatians because *that gospel* was denied. Luther split from Rome because *that gospel* was denied. And we have a duty like the apostle Paul, like Luther to be intolerant of any other gospel. Not that we would turn into party-spirited bigots. Not that we would use physical force. But that with our very words, and our very blood if we have to, would contend that the righteousness that God requires comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. Any other gospel is no gospel at all. All is lost if this is lost. As Luther said “If the article of justification by lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost...by this only doctrine the church is built, and in this it consisteth.”<sup>3</sup> If you think that is overstatement, he got it directly from Paul’s letter to the Galatians: “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then *Christ died for no purpose.*” (Gal. 2:21) If we get justification wrong, Christ died in vain.

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1979), pg. xii, xv, xvi

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, pg. xvi, xvii

## *The Big Idea...*

All gospels that preach *Jesus* + are damnable gospels and therefore we have a Christian duty not to tolerate them

This is a spiritual intolerance that I am speaking about. We are to tolerate all manner of personal offense. Jesus said “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (**Matthew 5:44**). Paul said “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God” (**Romans 12:19**) No we resist false gospels with our words and leave the rest for God who will render unto every man his due.

No outline this morning. I’m going to briefly exposit the text and then we will go to application.

## Exposition of our Text

### **As the authority goes, so goes the gospel**

Look at v.1 “Paul, an apostle—*not from men nor through man*, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father,” Paul spends an enormous amount of time in this letter defending His apostolic authority. In 1:11-2:10 that is all he speaks of. And this defense seems strange. But Paul wasn’t defending his person. False brothers had crept into the Galatian churches claiming apostolic authority while undermining Paul’s authority.<sup>4</sup> As Paul’s authority was undermined, so was his

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<sup>4</sup> This was a brilliant strategy, because these false brothers came under the guise of desiring to help the church. If Satan can’t destroy the church by bullets, he will use bad doctrine. Luther spoke about the difference between the black devil and the white devil. The black devil encourages outward wickedness: murder, drunkenness, adultery and the like. But the white devil, the angel of light as he is called (**2 Cor. 11:14**) is so much more dangerous especially in the church. He says things like ‘Jesus has done a good work, He started this glorious redemption, but He didn’t finish it. He needs your help. So obey these laws and all will be well.’ Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Kregel Publications, 1979), pg. 21-22

gospel. So Paul defended his apostolic authority, not for personal reasons, but because the gospel was being destroyed.

### **Jesus +**

Now don't get the idea that these false brothers came in wearing a badge on their shirt that said 'false brothers.' They were model citizens. They followed Jesus.<sup>5</sup> Don't miss this. They were *not* saying *you don't need* Jesus Christ. That was not their argument. They were *not* like the Pharisees in Jesus' day who rejected the Messiah outwardly. They confessed Christ as the Savior. But they said you need Jesus *plus*.<sup>6</sup> Jesus *plus* circumcision. Jesus *plus* the ceremonies. Paul's argument throughout Galatians is that Jesus + *anything* is a false and accursed gospel.<sup>7</sup> Let's look at the gospel Paul preaches.

### **Invincible sins**

Look at v.3-4 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins..." Dear congregation, why did Jesus give Himself for *our* sins? If by our own morality, our own obedience, our adherence to the law, we could even out the scales and make our sin go away, then why did Jesus give Himself for our sins? If God the Father could have saved us any other way than by sacrificing His own Son, would He not have done so?<sup>8</sup> Which one of you parents would would diagnose brain surgery for your small child when an aspirin would do? No Christ had to die because there

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<sup>5</sup> If you want to know what false brothers look like, just look in the mirror.

<sup>6</sup> Acts 15:5 "But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses."

<sup>7</sup> Dear congregation, this cannot be over emphasized. In our day, we Christians often lack so much discernment. As though anyone who says the name of Jesus, is safe. As if *all Jesus confessors* are *gospel believers*. If Paul thought that way there would have been no letter to the Galatians. If Luther thought that way, there would have been no Reformation.

<sup>8</sup> W.F. Adeney — "God would not sacrifice his Son to death if redemption were to be obtained at a less cost" Source: [http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/adeney/the\\_duty\\_of\\_intolerance.htm](http://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/adeney/the_duty_of_intolerance.htm) accessed October 28, 2017

was no other way. Jesus died because your sins were invincible sins that could only be conquered by the blood of the lamb. You can't overcome them.

When I used to set tile, there was a special waterproofing liquid that we would use, and you didn't want to get it on your hands. Because if you did, you would not get it off. The more you tried to clean, the more it spread, and the dirtier you got. And that is how with trying to earn God's favor by your good works. Luther said "Much less is sin taken away by [good] works...but sin is rather *increased* by works. There is no means to take away sin, but grace alone."<sup>9</sup>

### A different gospel

So it is not surprising why Paul was so disturbed. Look at v.6-7 "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."

Three things to notice here. 1) **The *time* defection takes.** Paul says "I am astonished that you are *so quickly* deserting him." Oh how quickly they abandoned the gospel. Paul had only been gone a short while. It's just like when Moses went up Mt. Sinai to speak to God, before the 40 days ended, the Israelites had already made a golden calf and began to worship it. How *long* does it take for you to start believing that Jesus isn't enough? How *long* before you start to fear and worry that you haven't done enough to appease God? Defection happens *very quickly* when we forget that our righteousness is a passive righteousness. Luther said "This is a righteousness hidden in a mystery, which the world does not know, yea, Christians themselves do not thoroughly understand it, and can hardly take hold of it in their temptations...so that this doctrine can never be taught, urged, and repeated enough...whosoever does not understand this righteousness, in afflictions and terrors of conscience, must needs be overthrown."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1979), pg. 6

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, pg. xii, xiii, xi

**2) They were deserting Christ.** Paul says in v.6 “I am astonished that you are so quickly *deserting him* who called you in the grace of Christ” The *him* here is God. The Galatians were deserting God when they added to the gospel. When it comes to the gospel addition always means subtraction. He says in **Galatians 5:4** “You are *severed from* Christ, you who would be justified by the law; *you have fallen away* from grace.”<sup>11</sup> Jesus + *anything* is *deserting* Jesus.

### **3) They were boasting in themselves.**

Paul tells the Galatians midway through v.6 you “are turning to a *different gospel*— [v.7] not that there is another *one*, [Paul is saying ‘there is only one gospel. Different gospels are no gospel at all. He continues...] but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.”<sup>12</sup> My question here is what would motivate the Galatians to believe in this distorted gospel? Why would the Galatians want to move away from free grace back to the yoke of the law?

Because the false teachers appealed to that pervasive sinful desire that is common to everyone. As Marshal Segal put it “We all secretly love a gospel that relies on us. We love being the hero, or at least a celebrated sidekick.”<sup>13</sup> We are credit whores. Being under the yoke of law means that I get to contribute—that I get some of the credit. Paul explicitly shows this to be the false teachers motive in **4:17** “They [the false teachers] make much of you, but for no good

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<sup>11</sup> William Perkins said “Here it must be observed that they which make a union of grace and works in the cause of justification are separated from the grace of God. Grace admits no partner or fellow. Grace must be freely given every way, or it is no grace. Hence it follows that the present Church of Rome is departed from the grace of God, because it makes a concurrence of grace and works in the justification of a sinner before God.” William Perkins, *The Works of William Perkins, Vol. 2*, Ed. Paul M. Smalley, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 2015), pg. 29-30

<sup>12</sup> What would motivate these false teachers to distort the gospel of Christ? What’s in it for them? Please turn to **4:17**. Paul exposes what is in it for them. He says “They [the false teachers] make much of you, but for no good purpose. They want to shut you out [from me—the Apostle Paul], *that* you may make much of them.” There it is. What’s in it for them? Worship. False gospel teachers always produce a pyramid scheme in their system.

<sup>13</sup> Source: <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/when-our-hearts-revert-to-self-reliance> accessed October 28, 2017

purpose. They want to shut you out [from me—the Apostle Paul], that you may make much of them.” False gospels allow us to be the hero.

Dear congregation, you were born a boaster. Certainly some of you are thinking “I don’t boast. I never tell people how great I am.” Do you do it inwardly? I was watching a John Piper sermon last night, and he started down this particular train of thought, and I instantly thought “Man that was dumb. I wouldn’t have said that.” My boasting is with me all the time, and I don’t have to say one thing out loud. This is why the false gospels of *Jesus + something* are so attractive, because they remove the *offense* of the cross.<sup>14</sup> The biggest offense of the gospel is a *passive righteousness*. A righteousness that comes by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

### **Damnation is on the line**

Paul says that any other gospel is damnable. Look at **v.8-9** “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.”

How serious is Paul about false gospels? He pronounces damnation on any intelligent creature that would preach them. He starts with himself. Because no doubt the false teachers would have accused Paul of trying to make

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<sup>14</sup> Paul tells the Galatians in **5:11** then whenever anything is added to the cross then *the offense* is immediately removed. He says “But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case *the offense* of the cross has been removed.” That word for *offense* is the word σκάνδαλον skandalon, it’s where we get the word **scandal**. The cross is a scandal. Meaning, and I say this with all due reverence: If your gospel doesn’t shock the hell out of you, it is a false gospel.

You wake up sinning.

You go to work sinning.

You pay your mortgage sinning.

That you teach your children the fear of the Lord while your sinning.

That all the good things that you don’t earn the slightest bit of merit with God. And all the bad things you do don’t make God love you any less.

That is a scandal. That should shock you. Your righteousness is wholly passive. It comes entirely from Jesus Christ, based solely on His obedience to God’s law, received only by trusting in Him alone.

the church *his church*, and so everyone should only listen to *his doctrine*. He shows this is untrue “If I—Paul—ever speak against the gospel that I formerly preached, then I call the curse of God upon myself. And this curse is damnation.

He then moves all the angels in heaven. And the effect is this “If Michael the archangel or Gabriel or any other angel preach contrary to what God sent me to preach, then they can go to hell.”

He then includes everyone else—everyone who has lived, is living, or who has yet to live. Calvin says here that “Paul [charges]<sup>15</sup> us to regard as devils those who shall dare to bring forward a different gospel from his.”<sup>16</sup> This threat of damnation was not only in effect 2,000 years ago, it remains today. Everyone who preaches that we are justified by believing in Jesus + something we do is under the curse and damnation of God.

### Why is every other gospel damnable?

Why? Why this terrible threat? Two reasons. 1) Because anyone who believes that gospel of *Jesus + something else* are themselves under the curse of the law. **Galatians 3:10** “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” So false teachers, if you are going to place your hearers under the curse of the law, you yourselves are cursed.

2) Because the gospel of *Jesus + something else* makes the death of Christ vain. **Galatians 2:21** “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” If one scrap of righteousness comes from anything that we do, then Jesus died in vain. God is not wise. God is not good. Christ died for nothing. That is what adding to the gospel says. “I don’t need Christ, I can earn my own righteousness.” Anyone who preaches that is accursed.

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<sup>15</sup> original—“enjoins”

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XXI*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 34

# Application

Our Doctrine: The Gospel is intolerant of both legalism and antinomianism (anti-law-ism)

I was speaking to a Catholic gentleman yesterday, and he was questioning me about what I was studying, so I told him. He said “So does that mean that I can just live however I want—an immoral life—and God would be fine with that?” Dear congregation, if you are not accused of that, you may not be preaching the gospel as clearly as you think. Luther was accused of that.<sup>17</sup> Paul was accused of that.<sup>18</sup>

The book of Galatians wars against legalism—the idea that “we have to live a holy, good life in order to be saved” and antinomianism—the idea “that because we are saved, we don’t have to live a holy, good life.”<sup>19</sup> Paul fights against both of these wrong views in chapter five.

Against **legalism** he says in 5:4 “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace.”

Against **antinomianism** he says in 5:21 “that those who do such things [sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these] will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

It is very clear that the gospel is intolerant of both legalism and antinomianism. The apostle is saying ‘If you try to obey the law for your justification, you have

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<sup>17</sup> “This I say, to the end that no man should think we reject or forbid good works, as the papists do slander us, neither understanding what themselves say, or what we teach.” Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Kregel Publications, 1979), pg. xiv-xv

<sup>18</sup> Romans 3:8 and the charge answered in Romans 6:1ff

<sup>19</sup> Tim Keller, *Center Church*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Zondervan, 2012), pg. 31

fallen from grace’ and ‘If you live a lawless debauched life you will not enter the kingdom of God.’ Therefore we have a duty.

Our Duty: Ask yourself: “Am I a legalist or antinomian?”

Dear congregation, each one of you is going to be more inclined to one of these views—either legalistic or antinomian. Which one do you tend to more?

So for the legalists I would say this: Legalism is more than just the idea that you are saved by good works. It is a heart attitude that believes that “God’s love for [you] is conditioned on something [you] can be or do.”<sup>20</sup> As long as you do the right things and avoid the wrong things, you will support God’s love for you. Legalists will tend to be jealous of others, insecure, harsh and ungenerous (**Luke 18:9**). Why? Because now your identity and worth come not from Christ but how your personal performance is being appreciated by others. And that monster can never be fed enough. And that monster is can never be happy with other’s performances that don’t match up to their own standard.

For the antinomians I would say this: First, there is an official position of antinomianism that boldly declares “I don’t have to obey God’s law.” But as Tim Keller points out, it is more than that. “It is the thought that since God loves me regardless of my recored, he doesn’t mind how morally or immorally I live...God accepts me as I am; he only wants me to be myself.”<sup>21</sup> Antinomians live for sensual pleasures—they are the prodigal son who spend their inheritance on worldly living. And anyone who mentions anything about holiness to them, they immediately cry “legalist.” You’re probably an antinomian if you don’t even care what I’m talking about right now.

Dear congregation, ask yourself, where do you tend to land? Are you constantly trying to appease God with your performance or are you living a reckless life because you don’t think God cares?

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<sup>20</sup> Tim Keller, *Preaching*, (New York, NY.,: Viking, 2015), pg. 49

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, pg. 50

## Our Delight: The gospel is a story of a king and a prostitute

Martin Luther when he was awakened to the grace of Jesus Christ wrote a book called *The Freedom of the Christian*. He likened the gospel to a story of a good and generous king (who represents Jesus Christ) who seeks out bride to marry. Who does this king pursue? A penniless prostitute (who represents all who would trust Him).

Now this prostitute couldn't make herself look like a queen, let alone act like a queen. But the King loved her in spite of her status. On the day of their wedding, what did the king do? He pledged himself to her. He gave her his name. He took on her debt. Her enemies became his enemies. His riches became her riches. Her prostitute status was vanquished and she became the queen.

But it's clear that she didn't earn her new royal status. She wasn't transformed into a queen by cleaning up her life. She was so far in debt, so ruined by her debauched life that it was impossible for her to change. It was the king who changed her. When he married her, she became a new woman. In spite of her rebellious life, she was now the wife of the King.

Thus is the gospel. For the **legalist** amongst you: you are and never will be good enough to earn the love of Jesus. Morality is not godliness. You don't enter into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ by your goodness nor do you stay in by your goodness. By yourself, you are a prostitute. If you are relying on your morality, you are outside the gospel.

For the **antinomian** amongst you: Jesus is too good to leave you in your sin. He transforms you. When you rebel, you are rebelling against the King your husband. In the parable of the ten virgins, there were five who rebelled against the king. They thought they belonged to him. But the bridegroom said "Truly, I say to you, I do not know." (Matthew 25:12)<sup>22</sup> If you are relying

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<sup>22</sup> "Whoever says 'I know him' but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him," (1 John 2:4)

on a intellectual belief in Christ, and Christ has not entered into your heart through the new birth, such that you desire to please Him, you are outside the gospel.

What Luther discovered about the gospel is that when the most ungodly and undeserving person simply receives Jesus Christ and trusts Him, then the greatest exchange in the universe takes place: Jesus pardons all our sins, and gives us all His righteousness. Not on the basis of our works, but by faith alone.<sup>23</sup> And this exchange changes everything. New creation. No more condemnation. Now

“It means, wrote Luther happily, ‘Her sins cannot now destroy her, since they are laid upon Christ and swallowed up by him. And she has that righteousness in Christ, her husband, which she may boast of as her own and say, “If I have sinned, yet my Christ, in whom I believe, has not sinned, and all his is mine and all mine is his.”’<sup>24</sup>

Make we continue to be intolerant to all other gospels save this one until the LORD returns.

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<sup>23</sup> Q. 33. What is justification? A. Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.

<sup>24</sup> Michael Reeves, *Freedom Movement: 500 Years of Reformation*, (Great Britain,: 10Publishing, 2017), pg. 15