

Part 2: Galatia, We Have a Problem

Tyler Velin | Galatians 1:6-9

November 2nd, 2025

"Houston, we have a problem." That's a phrase most of us have heard before to understate the severity of an issue. Some of us even know the historic context it comes from: The Apollo 13 Mission.

On April 13th, 1970, the crew of the Apollo 13 Shuttle was headed for the moon when they heard an explosion aboard their aircraft but noticed nothing immediate besides a warning light on the dashboard. The pilot, Jack Swigert, unaware of the significance of the issue calmly radioed mission control in Houston. His exact quote though was this: "Houston, we've had a problem here."

When filmmakers in 1995 wrote a script for a movie on the dramatic story of Apollo 13, they changed the quote. Why? Because while Swigert identified a problem his language in the moment didn't represent the dire circumstances they were really in. The filmmakers, and the audience, knew what Swigert didn't. That problem, was a dire problem. The move from "Houston, we've had a problem here," to "Houston, we have a problem," better captures the life and death significance of what was really going on.

The Christians in the Galatian churches knew that there had been a problem. Men had come, and they had preached a gospel different than the one Paul first taught them. In their minds, they had had a problem—but it seemed they were at a point where they could now safely sort it out on their own.

But Paul's letter to these Galatian Christians speaks to the same problem but highlights the immediacy and critical danger at hand.

These guys are talking about Jesus, they are reference the Old Testament, they are preaching about the gospel of God—certainly the problem isn't that dire. Maybe you're prone to think that today as you look at other religions or worldviews which seem to include or integrate Christian language and thought. Isn't it all the same thing—those small differences aren't that big of a problem.

That's why the title of our sermon today is, "Galatia, we have a problem." This letter dashes false confidence and attempts to solidify us on true and certain confidence. While we don't live in first century Galatia, we wrestle with the same problems of false assurance, and unrested confidence. Paul wishes to address and correct all of this with the blazing centrality of the cross of Jesus Christ. As dangerous as it would be to be aboard a failing aircraft outside earth's orbit—more dangerous and dire is anyone outside the gravity of the cross of Christ.

Our main idea today is this: **No clarity on Christ means no confidence in life.** Paul is going to give us three warning lights which we can use to help us diagnose false gospels, and to draw confidence from the true gospel. Those three statements are: **No gospel but grace, No message but Christ, No confidence but faith.**

Each of these are necessary; to miss one is to suffer catastrophic failure. But if we have all three, we have a clarity and confidence which is not misplaced.

So clear and present is the problem in Galatia that Paul gives no thanksgiving or warm greeting. Even when Paul writes to the church in Corinth which is a hot mess all over the place, he finds time to affirm their faith. Corinth knew the faith, and they knew their problem. But the danger of Galatia was that they didn't understand their problem, and they were at danger of losing their faith.

Paul wastes no time, **Galatians 1:6-7**, "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."

Here's our first warning this morning: **No gospel but grace.**

Whatever is happening in Galatia, Paul is astonished. That word is an emotionally weighty word. It communicates the kind of news which brings people to their knees. When you walk outside and a subzero wind hits you in your face and takes your breath away—you are astonished. Paul has seen a lot, but he's not seen something as tragic as what he calls "a desertion" of their own faith.

This astonishment is due to three issues. First, why they were deserting. If you recall last week, Paul planted all of these churches in the midst of violent persecution. Yet, in the face of danger, these believers believed! In Acts **14:21-22**, Luke tells us that before Paul left, he strengthened the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that, through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

This church didn't fold under the threat of the sword—the church was falling under the tongue of false teachers. We are often most worried about that which sounds painful—but our faith is most often shipwrecked by that which sounds wonderful. Martin Luther once wrote this: "It is a special feature of the devil's cunning that if he cannot hurt by persecuting and destroying, he does it under a pretense of correcting and building up."

These false teachers came in, preached a gospel that sounded better and used all the gospel language, and under the care of such evil men—they began to fall away.

The second reason for his astonishment was how quickly they were deserting. It is very probable that the time between Paul's initial preaching in Galatia, and their arrival and deception of false teachers was less than a year. The devil wastes no words, and not time when it comes to shipwrecking our faith.

But the third and primary reason for Paul's astonishment was what they were turning from and what they were turning to. They were turning from a God who called them in the grace of Jesus Christ and turning to a different gospel taught by those who would trouble you and distort the gospel of Christ.

Notice how the character of the messenger and the content of the message are drawn out.

Regarding character, lots of people are talking, but few of them care. The false teachers talk—but their purpose is to trouble and the means by which they do it is to distort and cloud the gospel of Christ.

It was the case in the early church, and it is a case made all the more common in our digital world, that false teachers were itinerant teachers. They often attend no church, submit to no other authority, and attempt to distance themselves from other believers. Why? Because if they stayed long enough, and were known well enough, their own lack of care for others would become self-evident. Their heart is not

to help you, nor to lead you to Christ, their heart is for their own gain even if it means the loss of the gospel.

But how opposite this to the Father who calls out to us in grace. That word, “called out,” is a word that means to “cry out or summon.” While these other men cast doubt and cloud—there is a heavenly Father who calls out with clarity and compassion to those who he loves. No one loves you like God loves his people. I can tell you that all of the elders here love our members. They will lay down their lives for them. But none of our elders love our church like God does. The cross is the clearest sign of that.

God didn’t just call out. God sent out his Son. That Son is the exclusive source of good news. This is the content of the message. The true gospel is the gospel that calls out to us in grace and leads us to Christ. False gospels distort and trouble us by leading us away from the gospel of Christ.

Now, it’s not that these false teachers don’t speak of Christ! They used the Old Testament, they acknowledged Jesus’ role as the Messiah. But there is a difference between the gospel of Christ and a gospel with Christ.

For example, we’ve all seen diners advertising the “World’s Best Pies.” And while, somewhere in the world, there is a pie that is the best—it doesn’t stop other people from claiming the title for themselves. Why? Because it’s hard to qualify it, they can’t taste every pie. They can’t pick out the ingredients on a whole.

But Paul here tells us the one ingredient which separates the gospel of Christ from a gospel with Christ. And what is that ingredient? Grace. Grace, grace, grace, and grace in Jesus Christ.

These false teachers aren’t opposed to grace, but they don’t think grace is enough. They distort the gospel of Christ not by removing Jesus, but by adding to Jesus. Talking about grace and trusting in grace are two different things.

These Jewish teachers have come into Galatia and they said, "Paul was kind of right--but he's not fully right. You do need to believe in Jesus, that's for certain. But Jesus isn't all you need to be saved. You've got to accept circumcision and start obeying the law. If you're going to be saved, if you're going to have good news, it's part of what Jesus did, and part of what you do."

But grace means God does it all. Grace is getting something you did nothing to deserve. God’s gospel is grace in Jesus Christ. It is what we sing when we say, "Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe, sin had left a crimson stain he washed it white as snow."

Will Christians go on to obey God? Yes! That's what living people do. But can anyone be called a Christian but by God's grace, and that alone in Jesus Christ? No. These people are troubled deep in their soul because they do not believe Jesus was enough to save them--and yet they accept a gospel that is a more difficult standard to attain!

Everyone wants grace, but no one wants to trust it. We desert God, and we run to others because at the heart of it grace is terrifying. If our hope before God is the grace of God and that alone then there is nothing that we offer, nothing that we do, nothing this world can provide which we can point to for our own assurance. Grace draws hope outside of us and fixes it firmly in the one who gives it.

And at times we might question the ability of that person. I know I do. I am often all too willing to accept the hope of another gospel. If I know I'm right with God because I go to church--I can look at my attendance record and say, "I did it." If I know I'm right with God because I don't get drunk--I can look at my sobriety and say, "I did it." If I know I'm right with God because I give more than 10% to the church, then my annual giving statement is my deepest security.

But grace means that we can only look to one place--the God who gives us grace in the work of Jesus Christ. If there is no grace, there is no gospel. There is no good news. It might trouble you to trust in this grace--but it's less troubling than trusting in your own performance or any external standard. You fail. Jesus didn't. The good news is done. It's finished. If you take the gospel with some grace, but not all grace, you don't have the gospel—you have a problem.

Maybe at this point you might be thinking that this gospel business is like the scene in the Princess Bride where you've got to choose a cup and hope it's not poisoned. How do we know which gospel is the gospel of grace--which Christ is the right Christ? That is to say, how do we know grace works?

Well, Paul continues: **Galatians 1:8**, "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."

Here is our second point this morning: **No message but Christ.**

Paul didn't live in 2025--but he knew the power of influencers.

But Paul reminds us the message, not the messenger, is what matters. God often uses poor messengers to produce his work. Pastors living in hidden sin still manage to preach a gospel that saves some of their listeners. Young Christians who can hardly articulate the gospel themselves are able to fumble and bumble their way through an evangelism opportunity which accomplishes eternal salvation. God has chosen to use imperfect messengers to preach his perfect gospel. But God will never use an impressive messenger to introduce another gospel.

He says to the Galatians, even if we (being his associates and the other apostles) preach a different gospel--we are wrong, and devastatingly so. The gospel is not dressed up humanism. What's impressive about the gospel is not the men who proclaim it, or what men do with it, what's impressive about the gospel is that it's the power of God to save souls.

Paul's message preached to the Galatians was what Christ did to save. In Antioch Pisidia Paul's gospel he preached was this: **Acts 13:38-39**, "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses."

Paul's gospel is that what Jesus did on the cross was everything we needed done for us. The law of Moses, the works of man, justify no one. The gospel is not a story of what man might do to be saved by God. The gospel is the story of what Jesus Christ, as fully-God and fully man did to save us. If you believe in him, you're free from everything.

Do you know that message? There will be teachers who come and teach nothing more but motivational sermons in the name of Jesus. You can do anything. You can overcome your challenges. You can solve your battles. And we want to be reminded of what we can do--we want important people to remind us

that we are important people. But the gospel Paul preached is not rooted in human influence or human ability. It's the influence and atonement of Jesus Christ. If the message you hear and believe is big on man and small on Jesus--you've got a problem.

The gospel isn't humanism, or man centered. But the message of the gospel is not just spiritualism either. Paul goes one, "even if an angel from heaven should preach another gospel." Paul warns us, "Be careful of gospel messages coming from people who sound spiritual--but are totally devoid of Jesus."

I once read that heretics often look like the holiest of all people. We live in a world that is growingly comfortable with "spirituality." And that, just like a man centered gospel, can seem safe. We will listen to those who admit there is a spiritual reality. We love it when people talk of God in public. But even if an angel were to show up from heaven and they were to preach to you a message of good news which is not rooted in the person and work of Jesus Christ--let them be accursed.

That's a strong word. Accursed. Paul is saying that those men who are preaching to you a source of salvation apart from Christ—those are men who are unsaved. They are under the wrath of God.

I hope this will be a relief to any skeptics here. There are all sorts of religions that claim an origin in the Christian faith. Mormons, Jehova's Witness, Islam—all would claim some cross over and legacy that intersects with the Bible and Jesus. But pay attention to what Paul says, it doesn't matter what an angel would say, it doesn't matter what Mohammed said, it doesn't matter what Joseph Smith saw, it doesn't matter what your YouTube spiritualist therapist said. Paul makes it clear that even if such a revelation were to happen, if it did not lead us back to the person and work of Jesus Christ then they too are accursed.

If anyone preaches, it matters not how spiritual their language, nor God focused their words--if there is no Christ they speak not the gospel of God.

This present age, as we saw last week, is a contested one. There are those who speak often, teach often, and often affirm Christ. And yet the Christ they believe in—is not the Christ presented in scripture. They do this to distort the clarity that God himself would desire you to have.

It's one thing to speak of the Christ of the Bible. It's another thing to believe what the Bible says of Christ. Consider for a moment the Roman Catholic Church and why we must be careful to see the problems. In direct response to the Protestant Reformation—the Roman Catholic Church set out to clarify their doctrines at the Council of Trent. I want to share with you their words on justification—that is the very gospel--how we are made just and satisfied with God.

While the Roman Catholic Church still affirms Trent—it was written in the 1500s. For the sake of clarity—I've tried to modernize the language but if you want to read them for yourself you can do so in Chapter 16 of Trent. Canon 1: "If anyone says man is justified by his own works without the grace of Jesus Christ; let him be anathema (that is to be accursed)." That's the same language Paul is using. The church is pronouncing condemnation on those who believe such things. This sounds good so far. Canon 2 adds: "If anyone says the grace of God, through Jesus Christ is given only that we might live a life worthy of eternal life; let him be accursed." So far so good.

But remember our first two warning signs: No gospel but grace, no message but Christ. Notice what they mean when they speak of grace and Christ.

Cannon 7: "If anyone says, that justifying faith is simply confidence in the divine mercy which remits sin for Christ's sake; or that such faith alone is where we are justified; let him be accursed." Cannon 9: "If anyone says that no man is truly justified except by belief, and that faith alone, is sufficient to effect absolution and justification; let him be accursed." Cannon 25: "If anyone says that after the grace of justification has been received, the repentant sinner's guilt is removed, and there debt of punishment is blotted out in such a way that they no longer have any punishment to be worked off in this world or in the next before he enters the Kingdom of Heaven, let him be accursed."

What Paul is saying to those false teachers in Galatia, is what the Reformers said to the Catholic, and is what we should say to anyone who downplays grace alone in Christ alone—let them be accursed. When the world threatens your salvation and offers you comfort by leading you away from God's grace in Jesus Christ—they are the ones in danger. They have a problem. No Christ, no confidence.

But for those who feel opposed by the world—and yet have this message—where there is Christ alone, by grace alone, in faith alone—there is the only source of confidence. **Galatians 1:9**, "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."

Here's our final warning this morning: **No confidence but faith.**

What does it mean to receive the call of God which is of grace in Jesus Christ? It means that you hear this message of God's work to save sinners in Jesus and Jesus alone, the one who gave up himself for our sins so that we might be justified to God and you receive it. Receive it how? By faith.

Whoever you are, you have a problem. Your sin has condemned you before God. And no gospel of man, no grit of man, and no great man can do anything to fix it. But the gospel of God does. Jesus, fully God and fully man came to do what you couldn't do die for what you did so that you might by faith receive all his benefits.

As Paul says in **Romans 3:23-25**, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins." Confidence is not your righteousness, but God's.

If you want confidence, you've got to look at your faith. This is it. If you have faith in this, if you have repented of your sins, and put your faith in Jesus, you need no other gospel. And this world will cause you to doubt that at every step. But we will not turn away from the call of this God. No one loves you like this God. No one calls out to you like this God. No one cares for you like this God and no one can take away your sins except this God who washes them away by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the one gospel we confess.

And when you think you have a problem--look to the only thing that really solves it.

Martin Luther writes to those who might feel the weight of a problem right now. He says this: **Let us therefore arm ourselves with these and similar sentences of the Holy Scriptures, so that when the devil tells us we are sinners and therefore damned, we may answer, "Because you say I am a**

sinner, I will be righteous and saved.” Then the devil will say, “No, you will be damned.” And I will reply, “No, for I fly to Christ who has given himself for my sins. Therefore, Satan, you will not prevail against me when you try to terrify me by telling me how great my sins are and try to reduce me to heaviness, distrust, despair, hatred, contempt, and blasphemy. On the contrary, when you say I am a sinner, you give me armor and weapons against yourself, so that I can cut your throat with your own sword and tread you under my feet, for Christ died for sinners. Moreover, you yourself preach God’s glory to me, for you remind me of God’s fatherly love toward me, that ‘he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life’ (John 3:16). And whenever you object that I am a sinner, you remind me of the benefit of Christ my Redeemer. It is on his shoulders, not mine, that all my sins lie, for ‘the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all . . . for the transgression of my people he was stricken’ (Isaiah 53:6, 8). So when you say I am a sinner, you do not terrify me but comfort me immeasurably.”

Church, you have a problem. But Jesus solves it. So stand in confident clarity and trust the gospel of God. When people remind you that you still haven’t done enough, say, “You’re right. But Jesus has, and that is the one gospel I confess, the one gospel the church preaches, and the one gospel by which God calls me to him.” When the world says, “You have a problem,” remind them that you know you have a greater savior.