

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Trinity Sunday, June 19, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 297, 373:1, 289, 386, 11:5.

Lessons: 1 Kings 8:20-21 and 41-43, Galatians 1:9-20, Luke 7:1-10.

Sermon Text: Galatians 1:1-8.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltrittter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Either false teachers had entered into the Christian congregations in the Galatian area of Asia Minor or they had listened to and accepted ideas from false teachers.

From the specifics that Paul talks about in this letter, we learn that such false teachers were teaching them they had to follow specific laws of the religion of the Jews. Salvation by faith alone was not enough. They seem to have objected to the fact that salvation can come from God purely as a gift, by grace alone. They contended that in addition to accepting Christ, the believer must also keep the Mosaic law and the Old Testament ceremonies. For that reason, these false teachers have been called “Judaizers”, that is, people who would teach the religion of the Jews. “[These false teachers] insisted that faith in Christ was not enough to obtain righteousness before God, life, and salvation. They told the Galatians that it was necessary to salvation to keep the ceremonial laws of the Jews, to submit to circumcision, to observe the Jewish feasts, [and so on.] Paul had taught the Galatians that in order to become righteous in God’s sight and obtain life and salvation, nothing more was needed than faith in Jesus Christ. To destroy this doctrine from God, these false teachers hinted that Paul was no true apostle of Christ, that he had never seen the Lord, and that he owed his knowledge of the Gospel to the apostles who had their headquarters at Jerusalem.” (Paul E. Kretzmann, Popular Commentary) These false teachers – whether men or women – succeeded in winning over many of those who had previously confessed their faith in Jesus Christ.

In the Word of God before us today we find

A WARNING AGAINST STRAYING FROM THE TRUE GOSPEL.

1. **Paul is amazed that the Galatian Christians have abandoned the true gospel so easily.**
2. **A perverted gospel is no gospel at all!**
3. ***“If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”***

Paul doesn’t waste any words before getting to the problems of the Christian congregations in Galatia. He often introduced his letters with some words of praise for the people to whom it was addressed, speaking of their acceptance of the gospel and their growth in faith. But in this letter, after his greeting, he jumps immediately, into the problem which is growing among the believers in Galatia.

In his greeting Paul asserts that he is truly an apostle because God called him and that same God has done marvelous things for the Galatians. He identifies himself as ***“Paul, an apostle--sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers with me, To the churches in Galatia: Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever.”*** Those words should reassure Paul’s readers that God the Father through Jesus Christ saved them and that message must be the only message that is preached to them.

Immediately after this greeting, Paul jumps into sharp discussion of the situation as trustworthy accounts had reported it to him. The perversion of the truth as practiced by the false teachers who were stirring up the Christians struck at the very core of Christianity. In attacking Paul personally, the enemies were really placing his office and calling under suspicion and thus directly hurting the cause of the Gospel.

Paul doesn't concentrate on defending himself, but he tells us again what the truth is and he identifies false teaching and warns against it, speaking very pointedly. He speaks to the congregations about the problems and points out the dangers attacking their faith in Christ.

He writes "***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel – which is really no gospel at all.***" He is amazed, he marvels that they are removing themselves from God; that they are abandoning the God who called them to eternal life in Christ and turning to other teachings.

He is astonished that so quickly they are turning from God who called them into the grace of Christ to another gospel. The news which Paul had received had filled him with surprise and amazement, since it indicated such a quick change of mind on the part of the Galatians. Although his opponents – the false teachers – had not yet taken over all the hearts of the congregations, the idea which they presented had gained adherents with remarkable speed, a fact which in itself was a disgrace to the people who had shown such an encouraging interest in the true Gospel. Paul had not been with them too long before this letter was written. They were willingly lending their ears to false teachers and were being won over to false doctrine. Their acceptance of another gospel, a message which claimed to be a message of salvation, a different and supposedly a better gospel was drawing them away from the truth and purity of the Word of God. It was not so much that they were abandoning Paul himself, who was only the messenger who had issued to them the Gospel-call, but that they were abandoning Jesus Christ and God his Father.

They had been called to faith by the grace of Christ, from the divine love of God the Father. Today we must be reminded again that the call to grace is due to the free mercy and love of Christ, and it is issued through the Word, by the mouth of the messengers of Christ. It is not a message made up by true preachers of Christ. Paul insists that the messages to which they were drawn were contrary to the truth of God and his Word. Their fickleness and seemingly searching for something better, more palatable, today we might say for "something more politically correct" and acceptable to society had led them to lose the truth of the real gospel.

Paul writes that "***Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.***" The Word of God before us today insists that there is no other gospel – no other "good news" which can claim to be genuine. There are some – and even today we must call them false teachers – who are planting ideas even in YOUR minds, unsettling you and wanting to corrupt and pervert the Gospel of Christ. That was Paul's accusation against false teachers, that they were attempting to pass off their false message as the only true and genuine Gospel, and that they were in this way marketing a lie.

There were two results of this deception: The false teachers were disturbing and troubling the minds and consciences of the Galatian believers, causing them to doubt the doctrine which they had been taught. They were also doing their best to distort and pervert the real Gospel of Christ, the glorious message of salvation through His name. If they had succeeded in their goals, it would have meant the end of pure evangelical preaching in the congregations affected.

The word "evangelical" is part of the name of our congregations. That is a word which means "gospel-preaching". The law and obedience to the law does not save us eternally. We are saved by the works, the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As God's redeemed children, we then want to live God-pleasing lives, and seek to obey the laws of God.

Paul warns them about accepting any other gospel from anyone: "***But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!***" Then he repeats those words in the first verse of our Epistle lesson: "***As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!***"

Those are terribly sharp words. There is no room for compromise in what God teaches. The Word of God you hear today from this pulpit is not just the ranting of an old man who is set in his ways, but it is the truth

of the Word of God. Paul emphasizes though he or an angel from heaven preach any gospel to you contrary to the Gospel which he preached to you, let God's curse be on him! The word translated in the New International Version "***eternally condemned***" is the Greek word "anathema", translated "***accursed***" in the King James Version. This is the same word the Roman Catholic Church uses in condemning the teaching of the Lutheran Reformers in its canons and decrees of the Council of Trent, when it condemns the teachings of God in Ephesians 2:8-9: "***For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.***"

Paul here is stating principles from God, which hold true for all times. Speaking of himself and his coworkers, and therefore of all true ministers of the Gospel, he states that no doctrine has the right to exist in the Church which differs from, and contradicts, the Gospel as it has been proclaimed by him in all his work. It is not merely a dispute between various teachers, or differences of interpretation, but the contrast is that between truth and falsehood. And Paul emphasizes: Not Paul himself, not any of his assistants, not any minister of the Gospel, not even an angel from heaven can alter the truth in Christ. If any one should presume to substitute a spurious Gospel, any false doctrine, for the truth of redemption, then such a one should be subject to God's curse, the end of which is eternal death. This is a principle which must be upheld by all Christians over against the claims of false teachers. Any deviation from sound doctrine as found in the Bible, any substitution of man-made philosophies and interpretations, places the teachers of such ideas under the curse of God.

This very teaching of God holds true for us today. No human and not even an angel from heaven has the right to contradict what God teaches in his Word. That is why we must constantly be on our guard against all teachers – from any source – who contradict the Word of God. My calling as pastor is to proclaim to you "***Thus saith the Lord***" (used 415 times in the King James Version!) and not my own opinions. Your calling as child of God is to search the scriptures, and not to listen to everyone else except God in the Scriptures.

And Paul explains the severity of his expressions, of his double anathema, by asking indignantly: "***Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.***" Is it men that I am now striving to please, or God? Or am I zealous about finding the favor of men? If I pleased men, I would not be the servant of Christ. If Paul's object were to persuade men and gain them for his own person, to seek their approval for selfish reasons, then his boasting about being an unselfish servant of Christ, for the purpose of advancing only the glory of Christ, would be hypocrisy and deception. But he insists that his only goal in preaching the Gospel is the furtherance of God's glory through the declaration of the entire counsel of salvation. He does this in his capacity as a servant of Christ, whether it pleases men or not, for all men by nature are opposed to the truth and do not desire the vicarious atonement of Jesus. If he were speaking to please men, he would in that way admit that he had personal interests at stake, and his message would be bound to be influenced by that fact. But since he has in mind the glory of the Lord, he speaks after the manner and by the Spirit of God, in single-mindedness seeking the eternal salvation of his hearers. It is this attitude and spirit which must motivate and guide every true servant of Christ at all times.

And so the hymn also becomes our prayer, not a *boast*:

*"God's Word is our great heritage
And shall be ours forever;
To spread its light from age to age
Shall be our chief endeavor.
Through life it guides our way,
In death it is our stay.
Lord, grant, while worlds endure,
We keep its teachings pure.
Throughout all generations." Amen. (The Lutheran Hymnal, 283)*