

**Third Sunday after Pentecost – June 5, 2016**  
**Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church**

*Pastor Charles Heup*

**Galatians 1:11-24 (NIV)**

**I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12) I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. 13) For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14) I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15) But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16) to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. 17) I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. 18) Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19) I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's brother. 20) I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21) Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22) I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23) They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24) And they praised God because of me.**

Brothers & Sisters in Christ;

Thomas Edison is given credit for the phrase, “there’s no substitute for hard work.” Many people think that there must be some shortcuts to success or substitutes for hard work but those shortcuts and substitutes just don’t ever seem to pan out the way most people would hope.

In the opening words of Paul’s letter to the Galatians Paul expressed his concern that the Christians in Galatia were being lead astray and deceived by false teachers who were promoting a substitute gospel. He wrote: (Galatians 1:6-8 NIV) **I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel-- 7) which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8) But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse!**

With those strong words, Paul makes it clear there is no substitute for the Gospel. But, what is the Gospel? What is the gospel? The word “gospel” summarizes the whole Christian faith. What is the gospel? It’s the good news of what God has done for us in Christ. Jesus Christ died for all of your sins and paid the penalty for all of your sins. That is the gospel! We have been called to live a life of forgiveness. That is the gospel! Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the powers of God and someday you too shall be raised up to eternal life. That is the gospel!

At the time of the apostle Paul, many Christians came from a Jewish background and they wanted to hold on to some of the Jewish laws and ceremonies. They also insisted that non-Jewish Christians needed to follow these OT rituals and ceremonies. They were distorting the teachings of the Gospel – adding rules taught by men. They apparently were clinging to OT laws that were no longer in force – laws that had been fulfilled by Christ. The demand for circumcision was one of those laws that was not binding on Gentiles. By demanding adherence to the laws of Judaism, they were promoting a substitute for the Gospel. So in our text Paul encourages us to

**Theme:** Accept No Substitutes!  
as he explains that

1) The pure Gospel is from God alone and 2) The pure Gospel gives glory to God alone.

Apparently, those who were seeking to undermine the message that Paul had shared with Galatians had questioned Paul's authority since he was not one of the original 12 apostles. In our text, Paul defends his apostolic authority and the purity of the gospel he proclaimed among the Galatians. As he relates his history, he demonstrates the supernatural origin and power of the Gospel to free and save from sin. His message is from God alone and gives glory to God alone. Listen to Paul as he explains the source of his message.

**I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12) I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.**

Paul regarded the individuals who were being led astray as fellow believers. He calls them brothers and sisters. He feels a strong bond with them. That is the reason for his urgency and his strong words. He did not want them to be totally lead astray from the pure Gospel God had given to him. Paul proclaimed a message he had received miraculously from Christ -- in that way amazingly enough, he was similar to the other apostles. Neither they nor he proclaimed a message of human revelation or opinion. The Savior himself shared the Gospel with the apostles while he walked and talked and lived with them. Although Paul did not have that privilege, the Lord Jesus appeared to him after his ascension into heaven and commissioned him to share the Gospel. Paul had been called and forgiven by Christ. He recounts his sordid past to reveal the life-changing power of the Gospel of Christ Jesus for the benefit of the Galatians.

**13) For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14) I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers.**

The man we know as the great missionary Paul was once known as Saul the persecutor – a man of zeal and fervor who at one time was convinced that Christianity was opposed to the Jewish faith – rather than the fulfillment of that faith. When it came to the OT Laws – Paul knew all about them and repeatedly sought to defend them! His critics accused him of being ignorant of the law – nothing was farther from the truth. It wasn't ignorance of the Law that caused Paul to omit it from the message he shared with the Galatians. The omission of the Law was intentional and deliberate. He consciously did this to show that he was setting aside his former way of life under the Laws of Judaism. This change as Paul will now point out was not of his doing but was the result of God's plan and grace.

**God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16) to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles.**

You can read the full account of Christ's appearance to Paul and his conversion in Acts chapter nine but for now, this summary is sufficient for us to see that Paul's pure Gospel message was from God and not from men. Paul highlights God's grace to him. As we consider Paul's words we are reminded of God's grace to us. The same God has chosen us from eternity and called us to faith in his Son and dwells in us with his Spirit that we may serve him.

Sinner that Paul was -- God did not turn away from his plan for him. God wanted him to be part of his kingdom and to become a worker in that kingdom. Already prior to his birth the Lord knew Paul and had chosen him as one of his children and servants. God's plan for Paul was formed in eternity and brought to reality in Paul's life when he was called to faith as he was headed to Damascus to persecute Christians. On that road, the Lord Jesus appeared to him in a blinding display of his glory and told Paul to wait for the prophet Ananias to tell him what to do. Ananias told him that God had chosen him to preach Christ to the Gentiles.

God had spoken and there was no need for Paul to consult with others as he explains in our text: **I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.**

Paul didn't need to consult with anyone because he was sure of his message – it had been given to him directly by the risen Lord. After his conversion Paul went to a rather remote area about 2-3 days journey from Damascus called Arabia. We don't know exactly what Paul did there. Some speculate that he preached the Gospel but the area was thinly populated. Others speculate that Paul researched and studied the OT Scripture in the light of Christ and his appearance to him. It seems logical that he used this time to sort things out and to grow in his faith. Through the Word, the Spirit was further equipping him for his role as a Gospel messenger – a work he did with great power in Damascus for a number of years.

If we pause for just a moment at this point, we can reflect on the fact that the pure Gospel gives glory to God alone. In every thing that Paul has written he is careful to call attention to what God had done for him – this isn't an "I" story in which Paul is putting himself up on a pedestal. Although Paul had been attacked by those who claimed his message was inadequate, Paul didn't take things personally. Rather he defends the source of his message – the Lord Jesus Christ – and gives glory to God. This section is intentionally light on personal details – revealing only enough of Paul's life story to help us understand the grace of God which calls sinners to faith and equips them to serve. Toward the end of this text, we will see that Paul's aim is proclaiming the Gospel that he received from God was to save sinners and to glorify God.

Now as we continue to examine this text we continue to discover that Paul's message came from God alone. **18) Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19) I saw none of the other apostles--only James, the Lord's brother. 20) I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21) Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22) I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23) They only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." 24) And they praised God because of me.**

When we keep in mind, the accusations that had been made against Paul – that his message was inferior, that he wasn't equal in status to the apostles we will better understand why Paul wrote these words. Although he initially had only a passing acquaintance with Peter and with James – men who were regarded as leaders in the church at Jerusalem and Judea and was unknown to the members of the churches of Judea still those churches had no complaints against Paul. In fact, they rejoiced at the unity of the faith they shared. They praised God because of Paul – praising God for his grace to one who had persecuted them and praising God because of the faith that Paul was preaching. Although his message did not come from them, it was in agreement with the message they believed because it came from God.

As we've discussed Paul's admonition to the Galatians not to substitute anything for the Gospel. We've been reminded that

1. The pure Gospel is from God alone
2. The pure Gospel gives glory to God alone.

However, we haven't made an application of this text for ourselves. At this point, you ought to be thinking and asking, "How does all of this stuff that took place in Galatia affect me?"

Well let's begin to answer that question by reminding ourselves that Paul is defending his Gospel – a message which is at the heart of **our** Christian faith. Much of what we believe, teach, and confess as Bible believing Lutheran Christians is drawn from Paul's inspired writings. Secondly, our Christian faith often comes

under attack by those who would challenge it in some way or another – perhaps claiming that it is inadequate for today’s society. So how can we be sure of our faith...do we need something more, something better, and something more up to date? Those are the same types of questions that plagued the Galatians. Suddenly a bridge has been drawn – we’ve been linked to the past!

If Paul’s teaching was from men and based on the culture of his day, well then we would have some big question marks to remove. Our text is more than just Paul’s personal defense of his teaching. Paul is defending the Gospel – he is establishing its authenticity, its source, and its power. Paul asserts that the source of his message and the foundation of his authority is from God. God gave Paul the message. God gave Paul the Gospel; God gave Paul his call and his authority. With that message and authority comes assurances. We can be sure that the Gospel is true and unchanging because it comes from the true and unchanging God. The apostolic teachings which we hold to and confess are not the invention of men. We can be sure of their truths because they have been established by Christ. Accept no substitutes. The pure Gospel is from God and the pure Gospel gives glory to God.

Paul silenced the critics by pointing to the power of the Gospel and the grace of God as it had been demonstrated in his life. That power changed Saul the persecutor into Paul the preacher. The Gospel proved it’s power in his heart and his life. And, the Gospel still proves its power in each of our lives.

The authority of the Gospel as God’s news of salvation is always under attack, as men seek to craft a more relevant message or to refine a purer version of the gospel. But, the Gospel needs no additions or subtractions – the pure gospel and the pure gospel alone offers forgiveness and life.

Just as Paul battled for the Gospel truth, so you and I will need to contend for the truth which is from God and which is intended to give glory to God. The Gospel has touched us personally just as it touched Paul and those who heard him proclaim it. May God’s message to you fill you with hope, joy and the assurance of the forgiveness of your sins and life eternal. Finally, may that same Gospel lead you to give glory to God as you hold on to and share his precious truths. Amen.