

## **Recognize Gospel Preaching**

[Announce Text] Please Open your Bibles to Galatians 1:1-10.

[Scripture Introduction] Good morning, my name is Brett Sweet and I'm one of the pastors here at Grace Christian Fellowship where we exist to glorify God through gospel-centered worship, evangelism, discipleship, and community. We are in three weeks of sermons after finishing Esther before we start Psalms 1-10.

[Prayer for illumination] Please pray with me...

[Illustration] Last year, an informed Christian named Colton Corter listened to 18 hours of preaching and evaluated what he heard. He listened to 4 sermons each from the nine biggest evangelical churches in the USA for a total of 36 occasions of preaching. I recognized the names of some of the pastors and churches. According to Corter, in those 36 sermons the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection was unclear 36 times. 36 out of 36. In a sense, Colton Corter claims true gospel preaching could not honestly be recognized.

As a pastor, my job is to preach the gospel to you every week so that it shapes all that we do. This also means that part of my job is to train you to recognize gospel preaching when you hear it. And to recognize when you aren't hearing it. Kids, when you graduate, would you recognize gospel preaching as you seek out a good church where your university is? Parents would you be able to recognize whether the gospel is being preached to your children if you moved to a different city? Those of you nearing the end of your life would you recognize whether the church you've been part of for decades as quit preaching the gospel? Galatians 1:1-10 lays a command on all of us:

### **[Proposition] Recognize Gospel Preaching**

Would you recognize if my preaching is leading you toward Christ or away from Him? How would you recognize it? Paul wrote to the Galatians because they needed help with this. They had trouble recognizing what was true gospel preaching and what wasn't. Galatians 1:1-10 give us some help. We'll look at four big ideas connected to gospel preaching. Those four big ideas are, the Apostle Paul the gospel preacher, the True Gospel preached, When a false gospel is preached, and lastly the gospel preacher's evaluation.

## **[Main Point 1] The Apostle Paul the Gospel Preacher**

The Galatians have false teachers convincing them to listen to them rather than to Paul. But Paul is going to defend his position in vv. 1-2

*Paul, an apostle- not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead- and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:*

So Paul lays down a contrast. He's a an apostle through Christ, not creatures. Christ, not creatures. Our Triune God alone is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Everything else is part of creation. Including man. Man is a creature. In the Galatian church false teachers are claiming authority but Paul contrasts his authority as an apostle with theirs. He is an apostle and preacher through Christ- the second person of the Trinity. They are teachers according to creatures- men. Being an apostle meant that you had seen the risen Christ and were appointed by Him as an official representative to carry on His teachings to the church. When writing Scripture Apostles were able to do that without error. Since the Apostle Paul the gospel preacher was an apostle through Christ and not creatures, it becomes essential for you that you recognize that proper gospel preaching will say the same thing that the apostles say in Scripture.

Recognize gospel preaching by recognizing the authority of Paul the Gospel preacher. Who was an apostle through Christ not creatures like you and me. Now let's recognize

## **[Main Point 2] The True Gospel Preached**

Look with me at vv. 3-4

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

When the true gospel is preached it means deliverance, not drudgery. That's the contrast to note here. Deliverance not drudgery. The true gospel is the message about Jesus Christ. Fully and truly God. Fully and truly man. He was conceived and born of the virgin Mary overcoming the sin we all inherit from our parents. He lived a sinless life succeeding everywhere we fail. And as we see here, He gave

himself for us as a substitute and as v. 1 said- was raised from the dead. He ascended to Heaven with the promise to come again. Why did He do that? To deliver us from our sins. Sin is disobedience to God law in any acts, words, or attitudes. Sin purchases a one-way ticket to Hell. But the gospel, the good news, is that Jesus did all that He did for God's glory and to deliver us. We are hopeless without Him. We cannot save ourselves. So the gospel is about deliverance, not drudgery. If you think the gospel is about you doing good works so that you are acceptable to God. If you think it's about you needing to obey the law perfectly, you are making the mistake the Galatians did. That mistake will lead to drudgery. The true gospel is about deliverance not drudgery. It's about Jesus doing all the work and Christians getting all the benefits. It's about Jesus delivering us from sin and Hell and this present evil age into God's kingdom. That will transform how we live now. It's about God getting glory not the preacher or the church.

[Illustration] Imagine this conversation for a moment and see if you recognize the gospel reality as true. You die and you come face to face with God the Father, hoping He might let you into Heaven. And He asks you this:

Father: What business do you have trying to enter here? I'm a holy God. Your best works are unacceptable to me. You have no righteousness of your own! Your sins killed my son!

Christian: But I do have permission. I've been delivered and given this permission slip. It's the perfection the Lord Jesus Christ's sinless life- your eternal Son. He signed it when He died in my place for my sins and defeated those sins by being raised from the dead.

Father: My Son has been seated inside for nearly 2000 years and hasn't left- how did you come by this? How did this permission slip come into your ownership?

Christian: Your Spirit gave it to me. He opened my heart to turn from my sins and trust Jesus. It cost me nothing.

Father (smiling now): Wonderful. Then my plan to save you is being followed perfectly. Welcome home. I'm eager to have you.

Christian: You want me in Heaven then too?

Father: Of course! Didn't you read that permission slip? Those are adoption papers. You are my son. Or my daughter. I'm the One who sent my Son to make you mine.

[Application] Thinking that way helps me recognize if I am believing the gospel. I'm dependent on Christ, but all three members of the Trinity are good and working for my good. One of the ways you'll recognize gospel preaching is by recognizing the gospel itself. The gospel states that sin is our biggest problem just as Paul does here. The gospel can't be preached without some level of acknowledgement of the bad news of sin. But talking about sin isn't a guarantee the gospel is preached. The gospel is about what Jesus has done to deliver you, not about the drudgery of trying to be a perfect Christian. Knowing the right theology, attending the right church, or anything else- though those things are all important. But those can lead to drudgery. Worse, they can cause you to be self-deceived. When it's about the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins then it's about deliverance. That leads to joy- the opposite of drudgery.

We must recognize gospel preaching. We're noticing contrasts. We've looked at the Apostle Paul the gospel preacher who was an apostle through Christ, not creatures. We've looked at the true gospel preached which is about deliverance, not drudgery. Now let's turn to something else important and examine

### **[Main Point 3] When a False Gospel is Preached**

There are three contrasts we need to note when we recognize that a false gospel is preached.

[Contrast 1] Desertion not different

Look with me at vv. 6-7a

*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.*

We must recognize that when a false gospel is preached and followed it is desertion not just being different. Some of us think it's okay for a small difference of opinion on the gospel. The false gospel preached to the Galatians seemed to only add one thing to Jesus. The command for the men to be circumcised. One difference. But Paul says that it's not a different gospel. It's desertion. It's

deserting Jesus. In a battle, you can't say, "You know, it's a bit uncomfortable here. I think I'll just switch to a different battalion. A different commander. No one will care. No big deal." That's not just different. That's desertion. And when someone preaches a false gospel that's what the result will be. There's no such thing as a different gospel. It's desertion to the enemy.

When a false gospel is preached there are contrasts. Contrast 1 is that it is desertion, not different. Now let's look at the next contrast when we really recognize when a false gospel is preached. We'll recognize

[Contrast 2] Trouble not tranquility

Look with me at the end of v. 7

*...but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.*

Almost every effort to change the gospel. To distort it. Is an effort to make it better. To make things smoother. Easier. To make life more tranquil. But we must recognize that when a false gospel is preached it will always lead to trouble not tranquility. The word for "trouble" here is often used to identify waves in a storm. Rather than having the tranquility that the true gospel will ultimately lead you to, a false gospel tosses you overboard in an icy ocean. A false gospel will ultimately only lead to trouble.

When you recognize a false gospel you'll see that it desertion not different. That it's trouble not tranquility. But there's one more contrast to note when a false gospel is preached.

[Contrast 3] Accursed not accepted

Let's read vv. 8-9 together

*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.*

False teachers changed Paul's gospel in Galatia, and people change Paul's gospel today. But notice the result. The result is that by preaching a false gospel the result is being accursed, not accepted. Paul gave his life and suffered immensely

to preach the gospel to people to keep them from remaining under God's curse for sin. To point them to Jesus who could deliver them from their sins. But now Paul is saying, and he repeats it two times so that we don't think he made a mistake in saying it, that someone who continually preaches a false gospel should be accursed. Condemned to Hell forever. They will not be accepted by God and they must not be accepted by a church. Why?

Paul knew that those who preach a false gospel are leading people to Hell. They are causing listeners to be accursed. So the teachers should receive the same punishment. So let's think about these contrasts for a moment and apply them to where we are.

[Application] The false gospel that Paul was addressing was a group of people preaching Jesus Christ, but not Christ alone. They were preaching salvation by grace, but not grace alone. They were preaching salvation through faith, but not faith alone. They said that you had to believe and do one little thing. Be circumcised like the Jews were. Adding one little work. A single, one-time event. And for that they deserve to be accursed. So anytime something is added to Jesus those who teach that falsehood are not to be accepted.

Mormons say that Jesus has not really existed forever. That there isn't one Triune God but many gods- Jesus being one of them. They would say that to believe what they believe is just believing something a little different. But that's not different. That's desertion. Jehovah's Witnesses require works to be saved and they say that Jesus isn't God at all. They also deny Hell. They promise that you can live on a New Earth someday but those who don't believe will simply cease to exist. They promise tranquility. But what they really give is trouble. Liberals, both theological and social, will say that sin isn't really your problem. If you talk less about sin or wrath or Hell or judgment you will be more accepted by God and man. But the result is that you are accursed not accepted.

Do you believe a false gospel this morning? Do you believe that you can be saved because of who you are or what you've done? Yes, Jesus is important you think, but what really makes you acceptable is your good works. Or your church involvement. Or that you've never committed that sort of sin. Or that you vote the right way. Or that you aren't rich. Or that you aren't poor. Or that you are a good person. You've lost weight over the lockdown. You've been baptized. Never

killed anyone. You mow your yard. Call grandma on her birthday. But none of that will save you. Anyone who preaches that to you is accursed. Do not trust in yourself. Do not trust in your family background. Do not trust in your church. Do not trust in the philosophers or celebrities or politicians. Do not even trust in your one time prayer. All of that can actually be a type of sin which is really your biggest problem. To avoid being accursed you must be trusting in Christ alone. That is the only way to be accepted by God. You must turn away from sin and follow Christ. The good news is that it's Jesus and what He's done that delivers you. It was His death that took the curse in place of others as a substitute. When you believe God credits the perfect righteousness of Christ to you. This is the best news ever! You will be saved from the wrath you deserve and be brought into God's kingdom which leads to everlasting life. Don't you want to hear this again and again?

Note also that it is the false gospel that leads to being accursed. Not a different view on the end times. Not because they use a certain Bible translation. Not because of their race or sex. Not because of their political party. Not because of their neighborhood or nationality. Not because of their view of counseling or baptism or church government. That's not to say that those things are unimportant, but if it's not impacting the gospel there is room for them in some church somewhere.

We must recognize gospel preaching. We're noticing contrasts as well. We looked at the Apostle Paul the gospel preacher who was an apostle through Christ not creatures. We looked at the true gospel that is preached which is about deliverance not drudgery. We've looked at what happens when a false gospel is preached which is desertion not just different, trouble not tranquility, and being accursed rather than being accepted. Now, on this ordination Sunday let's look at another important thing in recognizing gospel preaching.

#### **[Main Point 4] the Gospel Preacher's Evaluation**

I'm evaluated on my preaching by myself and others all the time. But how do we even go about evaluating the Gospel Preacher? There are contrasts that help with this too. Two contrasts with the gospel preacher's evaluation.

[Contrast 1] Message not minister

Read vv. 8-9 with me

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.

The character of a minister matters. It can qualify or disqualify a man from eldership. But notice also Paul tells us to recognize and evaluate a gospel preacher- by his message. You would think that if an Apostle or an angel showed up, that would be all the evaluation we would need. But that's not what God's word says. It says that it's the message that matters even more than the minister preaching it. So let's imagine something very unlikely. Let's imagine that I am suddenly endowed with gifting far beyond the average gifting I have. I become famous. People are amazed that you know me. The church explodes in growth. People want me to travel around the globe to preach to them. I start writing books and doing interviews on TV and the internet. None of that should factor in in how to evaluate me as a gospel preacher. What matters more than that is the message. If all those things came about and week after week I failed to preach the message of Christ. If I was never corrected by the elders or by you, you should go somewhere else. It's the message, not the minister.

This also means that you should have an affection for anyone who does preach the gospel. Some people like me as a preacher, others don't. Sometimes there will be other preachers in the pulpit who you will like better than others. But it ultimately has to be about the message, not the minister. That's how you evaluate a gospel preacher. The message not the minister.

But there's one more thing in a gospel preacher's evaluation that we must remember. Important for all of us, but for me especially when it comes to the gospel preacher's evaluation. The ultimate evaluator is

[Contrast 2] King not crowds

Look at v. 10 with me

For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.



An elder, pastor, minister, preacher, is a servant of Christ. He does what he is commanded. He has a king whose every order must be obeyed. It is the King who ultimately decides how the preacher has performed, not the crowds. That is both a comfort and a challenge for me. There are times where every preacher is tempted to want to please people, to draw crowds, to receive praise and acclaim from them. But that doesn't ultimately matter. The King will evaluate true gospel preachers well even if they no crowds. There are preachers who are being praised by giant crowds who are not pleasing the King at all.

[Application] Do you recognize that? In America we love things big! We love to be entertained! But what if the crowd on Sundays don't grow? What if the preacher says things that aren't pleasing to you but they come from the Bible? Do you behave as if the preacher must please you- one of the crowd- or do you celebrate that He's trying to please the King?

I don't know how long God has me here. I have no plans on leaving anytime soon. But if God is my king I could be called elsewhere. Maybe even out of the ministry altogether. I could be here for decades or maybe only days- none of us knows when we might die or be disabled.

You can help me and help this church by praying that the true gospel would be preached here. Pray that God would raise up more gospel preachers in our congregation and enable us to train them. You can pray that we would always follow the teachings of the apostles, prophets, and Jesus Christ Himself as we find it in the Bible. You can familiarize yourself with the gospel and how to apply it to your life so that you recognize the false gospel. You can be a discerning reader and listener- rejecting false gospel teachers and avoiding being impacted by them. You can pray the same for me. You can pray that I would be evaluated properly- based on my message rather than my clothing or my hair or my humor. You can pray that I would be seeking my ultimate evaluation from my King rather than the crowds and preach accordingly.

[Conclusion] It is one of the great privileges and honors of my life to be an elder at this church. But the best service I can be to you is to preach the gospel to you and help you recognize gospel preaching whether it's from me or others. Since there is one true gospel the gospel of Jesus Christ and His deliverance of us it's the message that really matters. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Englishman Charles Spurgeon, known as

the Prince of Preachers was called to preach in a country town in Eastern England. There were delays and breakdowns on the railway and the church service got started without him. It was time for the sermon and Charles Spurgeon still wasn't there. As he was walking to the chapel he could hear someone preaching from the pulpit. As he got close he could tell that it was his own grandfather. Spurgeon's grandfather was preaching from Ephesians 2:8- "For by grace are you saved through faith. And this is not your own doing: it is a gift of God." And he saw Charles come in the front door and saw him making his way up the aisle and said, "Here comes my grandson! He may preach the gospel better than I can, but he cannot preach a better gospel; can you, Charles?" We recognize gospel preaching when we know it's about deliverance not drudgery. It's about pleasing the King not the crowds. It's the message not the minister.