

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Galatians 1:1-10

¹Paul, an apostle—not from men, nor through a man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— ²and all of the brothers who are with me,

To the churches of Galatia:

³Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴He gave himself for our sins to rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father— ⁵to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

⁶I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ, for a different gospel, ⁷which is really not another gospel at all. There are, however, some who are trying to disturb you by perverting the gospel of Christ. ⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven would preach any gospel other than the one we preached to you—a curse on him! ⁹As we have said before, so I now say again: If anyone preaches to you any gospel other than the one you received—a curse on him!

¹⁰Am I now seeking the favor of people or of God? Or am I striving to please people? If I were still trying to gain the approval of people, I would not be a servant of Christ.



Did you know that bad news sells better than good news? It's called 'negativity bias,' a hunger to hear and remember bad stories.

Participants in a 2014 study often chose stories with a negative tone – corruption, set-backs, hypocrisy and so on – rather than neutral or positive stories. People who were more interested in current affairs and politics were particularly likely to choose the bad news.

And yet when asked, these people said they preferred good news. On average, they said that the media was too focused on negative stories.

Because this is our human instinct, undoubtedly due to sinful nature, God loves to tell us good news. God constantly repeats to us His good news. There's even a word for that good news, "Gospel," and at its core is not that we are negative creatures who are addicted to bad news. The gospel is that Jesus Christ died to take all our bad news away and was raised to give us a life of good news. Nothing is more important than believing that.

But there are forces out there who want us to lose the good news, and this was already true in the days of St. Paul. We need to be reminded often that Jesus has finished the task of salvation and the Scriptures are sufficient in the task of revealing that precious information to us. Paul tells us this, and if we could take this lesson and outline it, we might learn exactly ...

HOW TO LOSE THE GOOD NEWS

1. Add your deeds to grace and peace
2. Accept lies in lovely disguise

The book of Galatians is this most powerful, early, and beautiful expression of salvation by faith alone. It's a powerful precursor to the books of Romans and Ephesians. "*I am not ashamed of the gospel, which is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*"; but first, the book of Galatians. "*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*"; but first, the book of Galatians.

The Galatians were churches in several cities where Paul had started missions. Sadly, between Paul's work in Galatia, when they came to faith in Jesus, and his writing of this letter – the Galatians were influenced by manipulative teachers. These teachers aligned themselves against the gospel of truth. They taught as if Jesus had only partly succeeded in the project of salvation, yet salvation should be completed with the customs of Moses: circumcision; dietary laws; Old Testament pilgrimages and feasts; etc. Of course, even if you say this is the gospel, or good news, of Jesus Christ, it is not. It is, in fact, the opposite of gospel, because it seeks to add rules and laws.

So Paul wrote how astonished he was that these believers would fall for the law. He couldn't believe how quickly they would lose the good news. He was essentially saying, "**You have added your deeds where they don't belong.**"

But look at how Paul begins the letter. Even the group of those who have fallen into error for the most part was still called 'church' because of the believers hidden in it.

Paul spoke this brilliant, lovely formula: "*grace and peace to you*" or "*grace and peace are yours.*"

- *Charis*, the Greek word for "grace," was the usual Gentile greeting to start a letter.
- *Shalom*, or "peace," was (and still is) the usual Jewish greeting to begin a letter.

These two words, "grace" and "peace," however, coming from Paul, take on a greater meaning than the normal greeting. They contain a summary of all of Christianity.

- Grace contains the forgiveness of sins, a joyful peace, and a quiet conscience.
- But peace is impossible unless sin has first been forgiven, for the Law accuses and terrifies the conscience on account of sin.
- And the sin that the conscience feels cannot be removed by pilgrimages, vigils, labors, efforts, vows, or any other works;
- in fact, sin is increased by works.
- The more we work and sweat to extricate ourselves from sin, the worse off we are.

For there is no way to remove sin except by grace.

- Grace forgives sin, and peace stills the conscience.
- In this grace and peace, God loves you dearly, forgives you richly, cares for you daily, guides you truly, protects you completely, helps you individually.

This deserves our careful attention. For the words are easy; but in temptation it is the hardest thing possible to be surely persuaded in our hearts that we have the forgiveness of sins and peace with God by grace alone, entirely apart from any other means in heaven or on earth. **We would prefer to add our deeds to grace and peace.** But this is a surefire way to **lose the good news.**

Why? Wouldn't we think that, even if we are mostly bad, isn't it a nice thought to add our tiny little bit of good to the work of salvation?

The trouble is that we don't have a tiny little bit of good. The Bible says "no one is righteous, not even one." "Every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart is only evil all the time." "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags." Since even our good deeds are tainted with evil, adding them to the work of Jesus **makes the good news go bad.**

Just think about it: If Jesus did 95% of what it takes to get to heaven, and our job was to do 5%, we would have no peace. We would constantly wonder if we had done our 5%. Not only would we have no peace, we would not really have grace, which says that Jesus does it all – 100%. All of salvation is by grace. If we add ourselves to it, it is no longer grace, and the gospel is really no gospel at all. The news becomes bad, no longer good.

Jesus knew this. Early on in His ministry, the Bible tells us, *“Many people saw the miraculous He was doing and believed in His name. But Jesus would not entrust Himself to them, for He knew all men. He did not need man’s testimony about man, for He knew what was in a man”* (John 2:23b-25). This doesn’t mean Jesus didn’t love them or want them to believe in Him. It didn’t mean they weren’t nice people. It simply means He could not trust them. The believers were still sinners and still had an inner sinner to drown.

So you see how our nice thoughts can go oh-so-wrong. **When we try to add, we tend to subtract.**

Our nice Christian friends can also go wrong. Paul stresses this by saying it twice in very strong language: *⁸But even if we or an angel from heaven would preach any gospel other than the one we preached to you—a curse on him! ⁹As we have said before, so I now say again: If anyone preaches to you any gospel other than the one you received—a curse on him!*

God wants us to compare what everyone says to what He says. Well-intentioned statements, even well-intentioned teachers, can be 100% against the good news of Jesus. The road to hell is paved with good intentions. But friends gently and lovingly double-check each other’s words in the truth. Friends don’t let friends stand in God’s place.

In our time, false teachers do come to those places where there are Christians and good people, who love the Gospel. Why go where the devil has the upper hand? They would rather challenge God where they can seek and infiltrate the ranks. Then they can influence many, many more with false teachings that sound good.

It is no coincidence that some of the fakest religions trace their origins back to an angel who wanted to add to the Bible.

- Supposedly Gabriel came to tell Muhammed what the God of Abraham was really about, mistaking many Bible facts as well as trying to add to grace.
- Supposedly the angel Moroni came to tell Joseph Smith what to read out of a hat, redefining words like grace and peace, salvation and gospel.
- *“And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light”* (2 Cor. 11:14).

So test everything.

- Even if Pastor Bode comes to tell you what to add to the Bible, you must compare it to the Word of God and test me along with every other spirit.
- Even if St. Paul himself appeared to you, you must compare it to his other writings and test him along with every other spirit.
- Even if you have a vision of God telling you what to do, you must compare it to the Bible and test your vision along with every other spirit.

Again, Jesus could tell you this would happen. He said,

- *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves”* (Matt. 7:15).
- *“In vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the precepts of men”* (Matt. 15:9).

Alex Malarkey says he made it all up. The trip to heaven while in a two-week coma; the visions and grandeur of being in heaven; the experience with Jesus was all a fake.

The popular genre of “heavenly tourism” includes books that a person has gone to heaven and returned to share the experience. Often the person is a young child who had a serious accident or illness and maybe was unconscious, coma, or medically reported dead on an operating table. But then the person was resuscitated and lived on to tell about their visions and dreams.

Heavenly tourism has cooled a little bit since 2015, when Alex Malarkey, the young man at the center of the best-selling book, *The Boy Who Came Back from Heaven*, said he made it all up.

Alex Malarkey said: "I did not die. I did not go to heaven ... I said I went to heaven because I thought it would get me attention. When I made the claims that I did, I had never read the Bible. People have profited from lies, and continue to. They should read the Bible, which is enough. The Bible is the only source of truth. Anything written by man cannot be infallible." I couldn't help but agree with Alex Malarkey. In saying that, he really aligns himself with St. Paul in this morning's lesson. Nothing is more dangerous than to stray into heaven with our idle speculations, as **lovely as the disguise for those lies** may be.

The apostle's greeting is new to the world and had never been heard before the proclamation of the Gospel. Grace and peace—these two words embrace the whole of Christianity. For the sake of grace and peace, don't lose the good news. In Jesus' name, Amen.