

**Tuesday, October 6, 2020**

**SERIES: WE ARE FREE (A Study of Galatians)**

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**TITLE: Converts and Counterfeits**

A number of years ago I was traveling in India and Nepal. One evening, I decided to venture out to a local outdoor market where you could find knick-knacks of all kinds. Some of the common offerings were Coach purses, Nike shoes, and even Omega watches. Items are considerably cheaper in India, but the discounts for Coach purses, Nike shoes and Omega watches are pretty incredible. What would be a \$4,000 watch here in the States would cost \$50 at this market. I saw these items at vendor after vendor. People were snatching up these deals left and right. It was almost like Black Friday. I decided, as someone who likes a good deal, to approach a vendor and check out some items for myself. As I examined these items, I noticed that the Coach purses were actually “Goach” purses. Nike shoes were “Nekes.” And that Omega watch I really wanted, was actually an “Omegu.” In other words, they were counterfeit. They were fakes. *Rip offs*. But what’s crazy is people were buying them up – yes, even with names like Goach, Neke, and Omegu.

Counterfeits exist everywhere and in all areas of life - even the Gospel. There is a true Gospel message. But people distort the Gospel. Today there are many versions of the Gospel. In Paul’s time, people were twisting the truth and creating counterfeits. What difference does a counterfeit make? As long as Jesus is in the name, shouldn’t it work out in the end? This is what we’ll talk about today in Galatians 1.

Paul is writing the book of Galatians to a group of churches in southern Galatia who have been told the Gospel they believed is not the real Gospel. There were false teachers who were saying that their spiritual father Paul is also a counterfeit. But Paul knows the truth. He was a true apostle and commissioned by Christ Himself. The Gospel message He preached was true. But again, these false teachers were telling the Galatians a different story.

So let’s pick it up in Galatians 1:6 (ESV):

<sup>6</sup>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 —

Paul’s words are rather frightening. He says, “I am astonished.” It means amazed. It’s a word that means “to be bewildered”. Paul is frankly shocked - he cannot imagine how these believers could so quickly desert Christ. He says not only are they deserting Christ, he says that they are doing it

*quickly*. “Quickly” here can mean “easily” or “soon,” and this is probably what was happening with the Galatian church. They were quickly abandoning the message of Jesus Christ - the true Gospel. It's really quite amazing, because Paul spent quality time with the Galatian churches; preached to them; shared the Gospel with them. And yet it says after he waved goodbye and started the car, they had already abandoned the true Gospel.

Think about this: They had Paul as their very own teacher. Think about that one Bible teacher you would always hope to sit down with and hear a sermon. Who is that teacher? Or maybe it's a famous author - to be in an audience where they talk about your favorite book. Well here they had Paul, and they spent time with him: The Apostle Paul - the persecutor of the church, who was transformed by an encounter with the risen Christ! The man who had received the Gospel message from Jesus Himself. And yet they were abandoning not just Paul's message, but the message of Jesus Christ. The people that Paul was writing to were true believers. And yet so quickly after their spiritual father had gone on to plant more churches, they immediately abandoned his teaching.

Now, here's an example that may sound ridiculous, but see if you can relate: I can give my children a very clear message such as this: I'm going to leave for 15 minutes: Remember to feed the cat, change the litter box, and please empty the dishwasher - very clear instruction for 3 simple tasks. Yet when I come back from running my errand, the cat *may* have been fed, but I can almost *guarantee* the kitty litter box has *not* been changed, and usually only half of the dishes have been put away.

Think about you and me in church. How many times have we heard a very convicting sermon? We hear a life transforming message from God's Word, and we say, “That is exactly right. You're right pastor - I've been too prideful, or I should be less combative, or I should be slow to speak, slow to anger, and quick to listen.” But as soon as we get in the car, perhaps our kids leave gum on the seat and we freak out; or our spouse says something not quite right, and we immediately lose our cool. We're really not that different than the Galatian church. We're really not that different from my kids. And you better believe, we are just as prone to forgetting the true Gospel. We forget, and we move on.

## **DISCUSSION:**

N: Ok, so let's bring in Arnie Cole and Cara Whitney, and it's time to have a little bit of confession – because, you know, losing our cool happens to all of us.

C: This is a horrible story about me. And I would have been right, except for I blew it, because you know, Satan, he sits back and just observes, and he knows where we're weak. So I'm not one to flip out. I'm actually a very chill individual. I usually will just go, “All right”, and I'll do the opposite of flipping out. I just will walk away and not deal with it, and just cut people out. Probably the most revealing is - I don't want to divulge any specifics - but I poured just everything I had into this place - this business - and for personal reasons, I ended up moving on. And someone within the organization literally said that God was purging that place of

nonbelievers, and that's why I was leaving. And so that was the most hurtful, because I was very passionate about their mission - the whole thing. And I got wind of that Nat, and I deleted all of my Facebook contacts - I mean, this is of anybody that was associated with that place. I got an email from someone from that place and she said, "Did I do something wrong? I noticed we weren't friends anymore". And the Holy Spirit took a pipe, and beat me upon my brain, because I thought, "Wow, he got me. He got me." And I bought into that, thinking that nobody there liked me, that nobody cared, that everybody knew what was going on. He wanted me alone, and he wanted me without other believers. And I had to eat a huge plate of crow and re-request people. I mean, and ever since then though, I'm very mindful of that about myself.

N: How about you Arnie? Have you ever blown it?

A: Oh. Don't call on me. Oh my goodness. It's so many times, it's just so painful. Oh yeah. Oh yeah. You have - you know, usually catches me when I'm off guard, you know? And the way I get myself out of it is, I joke with myself. So, you know, I kid myself that "You are not going to get credit for handling this situation in a godly way". So I will laugh at myself. That's the only way I can do it, because, you know, *blessed are you, when people say all manner of evil against you*. Well, I just say, "Look at you - you're losing your blessing, buddy - You idiot". And I tried and that works about, I'd say about 10% of the time. The rest of the time, I just make an idiot out of myself. So, I'm still a work in progress, unlike you two. You know, I'm just still hacking away at it.

N: Well, we set a high bar, and we don't do it just to make you look bad, but it is kind of fun to watch in the wings. But no, you know, the reality is we do - we tend to be like the person who looks in the mirror, and immediately walks away forgetting what we look like. You watch the Israelites and God's Chosen People - He would deliver them, rescue them, you know, and they would come back into the fold. And it's like the next day, they're right back out doing the same thing. We can be just as guilty. And that's one of the reasons why I'm so thankful for God's grace: that He says, you are forgiven - no matter what you do. If you're my child, you are forgiven. Now, thankfully He says, I'm going to help you do better, so now do better. But His love for us never changes. And that grace never ends.

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One of the things I love about the Bible is no word is there by accident. Each word was chosen to convey something specifically. Paul says they were *deserting* the Gospel message. Deserting is a military term. It means to abandon your squad and join the other team. What's even more troubling is that they did this voluntarily. That's what the word here indicates - they weren't being coerced or forced to switch sides. No, they voluntarily and willfully left the true Gospel message for a false gospel.

And did you notice what Paul said? They were not only deserting the Gospel message, but they're deserting Christ! They are deserting Christ who had called them to Salvation. "Called" here could be translated "who called you once and for all". It's the effectual call to Salvation.

Paul says that they are *deserting him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel*. Remember, the true Gospel message is a Gospel of grace. Here's the problem: The Judaizers - these legalists - were a problem for the church. But I think many of them may have actually understood that Jesus was the Messiah. They recognized potentially that this was their long-awaited Rescuer. They'd waited for Him all these years. They understood that He was the only one who could pay the penalty for their sin. But the problem is, they began to add in additional requirements to the Gospel. They began to add works of the Law to the Gospel. They thought they could improve the Gospel – make it better and a little more familiar to their religious ways. The problem is, there is a true Gospel, and the moment you take anything away from it - or in this case, add one thing to it - it no longer is it the Gospel.

So what is the Gospel message? We know from First Corinthians 15, the Gospel message is really quite simple: According to First Corinthians 15, the Gospel message is that Jesus Christ died for our sins, He was buried, and He rose again. And He appeared to more than 500 people, including the disciples, Peter, and Paul. But then listen to what Ephesians 2 says. Now, this is one of my favorite passages in all of Scripture, because it paints the Gospel just as Jesus Christ meant it to be - that true Gospel that Paul had preached to the Galatian church.

Ephesians 2:8-10 (ESV) says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

That, friend, is the true Gospel. It is a Gospel of grace. Earlier in Ephesians 2, it says we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were completely incapable of saving ourselves, because we were spiritually dead. In verse four, it says “But God being rich in mercy saved us through Jesus Christ.” And then in verse 8, “For by grace you been saved.”

It's a gift. Salvation comes freely from God to those who turn from their sin and turn to Him. It's through faith - believing. And that's why in verse nine, he says that this is *not as a result of works*. There's nothing you can do to earn Salvation. And that's what the Judaizers were doing. They were saying, yes, it is by grace you are saved - but you also need to do these rituals, go and perform these ceremonies, and add a little bit of your own work, to make sure the Salvation sticks. But Paul knows better. That's why he continues in verse 7:

<sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

One of the reasons I like Paul so much is because he says it exactly like he sees it. He doesn't try to mince words or be politically correct. He says this false gospel that you are believing - this Salvation by grace, plus works - it's not even a false gospel - it's no gospel. Quite the remarkable claim: that a false gospel with anything added to the grace of Jesus Christ is no gospel at all – just like those counterfeit items I saw in India! They could not even be counted as a watch, or a

purse, or a shoe probably, because most of those items that are counterfeit and cheaply made fall apart. They are good for nothing more than paperweights or filling trash cans.

Paul says *another*, which means referring to something of the exact same kind. Again these Judaizers likely understood who Jesus Christ was and believed He was the Son of God, and the great miracle worker. They likely believed that He was crucified and rose again. But then they distorted the true Gospel and said, yes believe it, but you have to add a few more things, just to be safe. And by adding works to Salvation, they undermined the Gospel of God's grace, and because of that, it was not a Gospel at all. The Gospel is Good News. But a false gospel that leaves you dead in your sins is not good news - It's despicable, and bad news.

In the NASB translation, Paul says the Judaizers were *disturbing* - it means to be stirred up; to be shaken back and forth - it means to agitate – to be completely disoriented. And because they have done this, they distort the gospel. *Distort* carries the idea of reversing something. It means doing a 180 degree turn, and go back the exact way you were going. That's why Paul says this is no gospel at all - it is bad news. Ok Paul. We get it - they've believed this false gospel. Set them back on the original course they were on. So what? Listen to Paul, as he continues in verses 8 and 9:

<sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> 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.

Paul's language is incredibly powerful. He does not want to make the Galatians nor us think that false teaching is anything but offensive and worth of condemnation. He said in hyperbole, that even if an Angel from heaven were to preach a different gospel –which we know they wouldn't, because a true Angel of Heaven is a Messenger from God –but he's saying even if that were to happen, you should not embrace it, because you know the true Gospel. It is a gift that you cannot add works to. So anyone who adds works to the Gospel - anyone who makes legalism the source of Salvation – for that matter, anyone who would remove anything from the Gospel - let them be accursed. It's the word *anathema* - It means devoted to destruction.

Listen to what John wrote in 2 John 1 about this type of person:

“If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, <sup>11</sup> for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works.”

You've probably heard that what you tolerate, you promote. The Bible says if you do nothing about evil and sin, you are sinning yourself. Paul has no tolerance, therefore God has no tolerance, for false teaching and false teachers. Those who deceive the body of Christ away from the true Gospel, and from Jesus Christ Himself, they are accursed - destined for destruction.

Today there are false gospels and false teachers everywhere we look - whether they promote license - abusing grace - to sin - or adding works to the grace of Jesus Christ, they are all false teachers, and are all leading people astray.

Paul said, *for by grace you have been saved through faith and because of that you become God's masterpiece.* It is my prayer that we will all carefully evaluate who we listen to, and what it is we really believe about Jesus Christ and the Gospel He provides.

What is it that you have allowed to creep into your belief about the Gospel today that needs to be eradicated? What counterfeits have you collected and need to release today? Today, reject the false teachers and the false gospel you may have believed, and instead, embrace that life transforming and soul saving Gospel. Because of Jesus Christ, you are free.

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N: All right, time to talk with Cara Whitney and Arnie Cole. Cara, what are some of the most common forms of false Gospel that you see and hear today? And how do you spot the real deal?

C: I think the worst one is that "all roads lead to Heaven". I think it's cruel, mean, horrible, to sit and tell someone that how they're living their life without Jesus is going to get them to Heaven. It isn't; it isn't.

N: Yeah, but what do you say to a Christian who says, "Yeah, but 'God so loved the world that He sent His only Son. You know, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish'. I mean, God loves everybody, so isn't that going to be good enough?"

C: Then Jesus said, "I am the way the truth and the life. And nobody comes to the father except through Me".

N: You're exactly right.

A: Read the Old Testament. That's what I'd tell them - read the Old Testament.

N: Well, and what you can just say is - just read the Bible. Read the Bible; look at the whole testimony of God, and see what He has to say. And the reality is though, He does save us by grace. And as Ephesians Two says, that through faith, even that is part of God's working. So, you know, it's Him and it's us, but we have to work with Him in that process. We have to be willing to bend our knee to the Lordship of Christ. And so, if you're not willing to do that, and He says, He's the only way, then we've rejected Him. And then we are all in our sins and trespasses. Arnie, when you look at the purveyors of counterfeit gospels - those people who are sharing the false gospels - why do you think they're doing it? But more importantly, why is it so popular?

A: I want to sound smart here, but I think it's an oxymoron, what you just said - if not, we're going to make it one. [Good] Because the reason they do the false gospel, is because it makes

them popular. I mean, I've been in countries where this prosperity gospel runs rampant, and "name it and claim it", and all of that. And the reason they do it, is it makes money - It is popular. And so it's aimed at deceiving people, which kind of tells you who's behind it.

N: Well, I think you're right on the money there. I mean - I'm going to preface this with saying - I have nothing against multilevel marketing businesses. I have nothing against those great things, right? But it's like the rich person up there, saying, "Look, you can be like me, if you do this, you sell this product, or you pay me \$300." That's kind of what those guys are saying: "Hey, come be part of Jesus Christ. You're going to get the car, the house and the blonde - all, you know, free and clear - no taxes." Who wouldn't want to be part of that? I mean, that sounds really good, but the reality is, it's not true. Let's talk practically, because I know there are people who are listening today, who have friends, they have family members, and they have been trapped. They are part of a false gospel. They believed it. But these listeners want to help rescue them from it. What should they do?

C: Yeah, I would say pray. I think if there's a place where you can talk to them about it - they have cancer, and they're going to a doctor that won't tell them that they have cancer.

N: Yeah. I think we as Christians need to be praying, but I bet you guys would also say that we need to get them into God's Word, to let them see directly what God has prescribed. And I've talked with some people who have been in very legalistic versions of Christianity. They believe in God's grace, but they still tack on all these things - better safe than sorry. And so I take them back to God's Word. And I think honestly, one of the best things that I can hand them, and I do hand them today, is goTandem - the app that we've developed here at Back to the Bible - because it's free, and it gives them Scripture daily. And I let God's Word do the heavy lifting. So we pray for them by name, we invest in them, but we give them God's Word, and we let it do the work.