



**Excess Baggage**  
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*Galatians Ch 1: Vs 6-9.* "I marvel that you are turning away so soon from him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say it again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.

Put this repetition in cement throughout your thinking process; Paul here is using repetition to make sure that we understand that another gospel includes prejudice and cultural values which will interfere with the good news that has been revealed. It appears as if Paul is having trouble with discarding the traditions that were part of his entire life. That is why he says in verse 14, "Being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my father's". After struggling with that condition, Paul insists that Christ is all in all who believe.

*Verse 11 say's,* But I make known to you brethren that the gospel, which was preached by me, is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ.

The letter to the Galatians provides the following.

- (1) The simplicity of the gospel is, to make known and to open the nature of Jesus satisfaction of presenting Himself as our surety in obedience to God the Father.
- (2) To fulfill and to suffer all that the law required of us, thereby freeing us from the wrath and curse due to us as sinners.
- (3) To establish the truth of this self giving act; to prove beyond any doubt that Jesus made full satisfaction for the sins of all those who believe.
- (4) Jesus came to satisfy God the Father for us by presenting Himself as surety in our stead, which includes everything for our good.
- (5) To answer the most considerable objections made against the truth of the gospel, and lastly to apply these throughout the universe.

Philippians 2:8 proclaims, "And being found in the appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the (point of) death, even the death of the cross.

John 10:17-18 tells us, "Therefore my Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it again. The gospel not only embodies our freedom for eternal life, but also contains absolute clarity to all who seek.

If the letter to the Galatians emphasizes anything, it is that Christ alone is sufficient for our salvation- nothing more nothing less. This includes the generations of the new covenant, including all ethnic, cultural and sub cultural groups.

What happens when the gospel spreads from one culture to another?

A collision with a clash of values and perception, that affect the cause, and reason of Christ. This influence does impact a believer's spiritual life. Paul's letter to the Galatians shows that cultural and ethnic conflicts began right from the start of the Christian movement; because they caused division, is no reason for us to carry it on.

Jesus specifically mandated that his followers cross ethnic, national, tribal, linguistics, and cultural lines to spread the message of salvation throughout the world. Yet these ethnic problems occur in many of our so-called Christian assemblies. Why? Because we do not receive and apply the message that Jesus commanded, which will remove this excess baggage from our lives. Still every generation is marked by the tendency to classify believers and un-believers according to outward observance.

Some are considered first class, others second class and maybe even a third class of people. In nearly every case, the re-segregating in the church results from an add-on of a man-made idea to the simple, pure and Holy Gospel of Christ Jesus.

So what is an add-on? We all have roots. No matter who we are, the history of our family has had a profound impact on us. Most often with a similarity of what Paul had to overcome. Yet these powerful influences are often un-recognized by others, and they frequently cause people to misunderstand others from different backgrounds. Never the less, God values all of the people of the world and seeks to bring them into His eternal family. To that end in repetition, the Bible calls Christ's followers to overcome barriers of race, ethnicity, language, and culture. Our ultimate allegiance must be to Christ, and His word, but we must not deny our own roots or those of others. We can celebrate the riches of diversity through the freedom that Jesus gave his life for. We should all be proud of the heritage that God has created for his own pleasure. To deny our ethnic heritage, is to deny why God made us all different. I sometimes wonder in amazement why there is such an unfathomable variety in mankind.

The New Testament is full of scripture addressing the issues of ethnicity. The list of scripture is too numerable to mention in this sermon however, the book of Acts includes many scriptures addressing these subjects. The Gospels as well as most of the letters in the New Testament talk about roots, backgrounds, and diverse ethnic cultures. So, it is a most important issue that affects the growth of a Christian assembly.

Let us go back to the add-ons that impair the gospel. Racial and ethnic problems are only part of hindering Church growth. These add-ons originate from the saints in the church that introduce and add their own ideas to the Gospel. I call them "super saints."

In my scope of experience I have been to churches that practice separatism to the fullest. During A liturgy racial groups segregate themselves away from other people with different backgrounds. The worst part being are when they get together they shoot the gossip about the unlike people in the church. Sometimes I would wonder if that was the reason they came to church? Then there is the Holier-than-thou group that constantly uses the index finger to point out some-ones faults or short comings; the Pharisaical types that look at the speck in some-ones eye and fail to look at the timber in their own eye, as "Jesus said". We need to remember, that when we point the finger there are always three fingers pointing back us and one up to God. Not forgetting the legalist group with their own ideas of the Gospel, thinking they are ever closer to Christ than the lower class.

Some examples of what I have been told, as minister of the gospel. They can't be Christians, or not saved because...

"I saw a group of men studying the Bible with a case of beer on the side."

"I saw this woman that goes to our church walk into a bar."

"We went to clean this lady's house and she lives like a pig".

"This guy went out and got drunk with his buddies".

"This man and woman come to our church and are not married"

"This man can not serve in the church, he has no education, and besides he is of a different nationality".

Lastly, the only way that God will save you, is by tradition, an assumed doctrine, or by a long list of does, and don'ts, and the list goes on.

This list of clichés can grow to an enormous size, and I thank the Lord for his patience with us all. We are commanded to help our brother or sister, who is caught in sin with the spiritual maturity, love and understanding that God has given us, being extremely careful to work with a fact instead of an assumed conclusion. Not pointing the finger or condemning but restoring-not just talking about someone but helping.

Wouldn't we live a happier life with more freedom, if didn't we go around worrying about what some else says or does. God tells us, "Seek out your own salvation with fear and trembling". Not somebody else's. This does not mean that we as disciples cannot guide people into the saving knowledge of the gospel. Are we unable to see with our spiritual eyes, that which is one of the main reasons the church was formed.

Certain customs and the repetition of family gatherings-these all bring solidarity to the immediate primary social group, as well as the church family. However, we need to be careful that these are not the traditions of the world. We must form spiritual traditions.

We are all in the same boat including this preacher. I sometimes wonder why God doesn't strike us dead for acting contrary to What Jesus has commanded. But there is hope for us all. To help you understand what I am trying to say, I will use this illustration of a Sunday school teacher: He was a quiet, godly man with a quick wit. Reflecting on one of the verses in a lesson, which said, "Abstain from all appearance of evil," he said with a chuckle, "please don't do as I do-do what I say." He then explained with a smile, I was on my way to the post office when I spotted a beer can on the sidewalk. I picked it up to throw it away. Turning around too fast, I momentarily lost my balance with the empty can of beer in my hand proceeded to stumble and trip the whole way up the stairs, with on-lookers watching everything I was doing". Can we wonder about this story went around at least three times.

Things or circumstances are not always what they seem to be. Do you not think that Paul who wrote this epistle struggled with some excess baggage in his life that we live with? Brother Paul even more so, being a religious hater and killer of newly formed Christians. However there is hope for us all, as we look at Paul's life and how he grew in Christ to overcome his prejudice of these Christ followers that, and also people that were not Jews. Doesn't remind us of the different denominations in the world today; our way is the only right way to God yours is wrong. Notice, Paul did not start out as a super saint. Nor did he end up that way. On the contrary, he grew in the faith with difficulty. Take notice how the view of him changed over time.

The following dates are approximate.

Circa A.D. 55: "I am the least of the apostles". (1COR. 15:9.

Circa A.D. 57: "I know that in me...nothing good dwells".

Rom. 7:18.

Circa A.D. 60: "[I am] less than the least of the saints".

(EPH.3:8).

Circa A.D. 63: "Jesus came...to save sinners, of whom I am chief.

(1-TIM. 1:15). Paul by action is growing in Christ by daily discovering his depravity, as a sinner: it is called growth.

### **Do we have an identity crisis?**

We need to stand for something; to stand with complacency or nothing is to stand against God. In 1 COR. 16:12-15. "Believers in Christ are called to be kind, humble, meek, and long-suffering; to bear with one-another as they seek the unity of the body. At the same time, we are called to "stand fast" in the faith.

In Luke 6:45. "Jesus said that our actions give away our value system". What we do shows what we really believe.

Do you know that God takes us captive, only to set we free.

In verse 3:28.Paul emphasis the three major social distinctions no longer matter to Christ:

Ethnicity: "Neither Jew nor Gentile."

Socio-economic Status: "Neither Slave nor free."

Gender: "Neither Male nor Female."

Christians have become children of God through faith, which means we are all in the same family; these anti-gospel issues should no longer divide us.

In the early Christian communities that meant that both gentiles and Jews could exercise their spiritual gifts. Both slaves and masters could pray and prophesy. Both women and men could enjoy full membership in the body. "Christ, [was, is], all and in all." (Col 3:11). The breaking down of traditional barriers wasn't just a future hope. The early church worked to make it a reality. We in Grace Church should be working hard to make this happen with people and denominations throughout South Park. But need to ask ourselves, what walls of ethnicity, status, or gender divide us as believers today. Are we willing to model reconciliation between different and even antagonistic groups? If not, then is our Church truly a sign of God's Kingdom, or merely a human institution?