

A Fear-Distorted Gospel

Galatians 1:6-10 - NCBC, March 19, 2017

Main Point: **The fear of man will always distort the true Gospel of God.**

- Because the fear of man calls us to law more than grace (6-7)

Whose works are you trusting in? Why?

- Because the fear of man respects popularity more than principle. (8-9)

Whose voice are you listening to? Why?

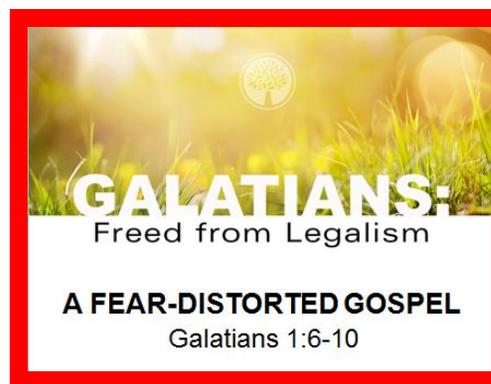
- Because the fear of man seeks approval from others more than God. (10)

Whose approval are you seeking? Why?

Opening Announcements:

Easter Outreach & Service Promotions

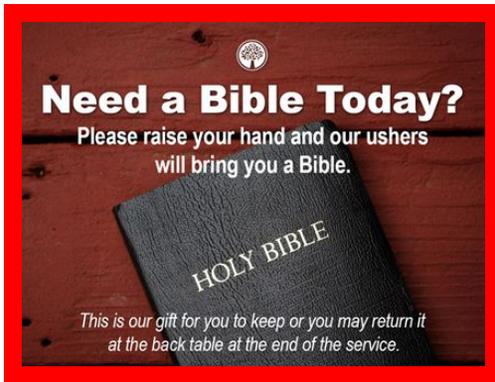
<<In Christ Alone>>



We glory in a bloody cross today for two reasons. Because at the cross Jesus Christ died the death our sins deserved. And then Jesus Christ rose from the dead so that we could live the life we were created to live.

The good news of God's gospel is the joyful song of our hearts this morning – for God has set us free from our sins for His glory and by His grace alone.

So I invite you to continue your worship now by opening your copy of the Scriptures to **Galatians chapter 1**.



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, please catch the attention of the ushers now. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room.

And while you're preparing for our Scripture reading, let me just add my thanksgiving for our First Responders who are worshipping with us today.



We live in difficult days. Many people love themselves more than God.¹ What is right is often called wrong, and what is wrong is often called right. And those who serve our communities as civil servants – even our first responders – are too often despised, judged, or just taken for granted.

And so New Castle Bible Church wishes to publicly give honor to whom honor is due this morning. Please receive our humble thanksgiving for your faithful and sacrificial ministry in our communities.

Does it surprise you that I refer to you as ministers?

I refer to civil servants as ministers because that's the word that God uses for you in **Romans chapter 13**. In **verse 4** God teaches that the civil servant is "God's servant" for the common good as he/she works for justice among the people. In **verse 6** it says these "authorities are ministers of God."

In other words – if you serve as military, or a police officer, or a fireman, or a sheriff, or a first responder – God has appointed you as one of His ministers to promote justice and peace within the community.

So from one minister to another – we thank God for you. We pray for you. And we pray that your hearts will be encouraged and blessed by our love towards you today.

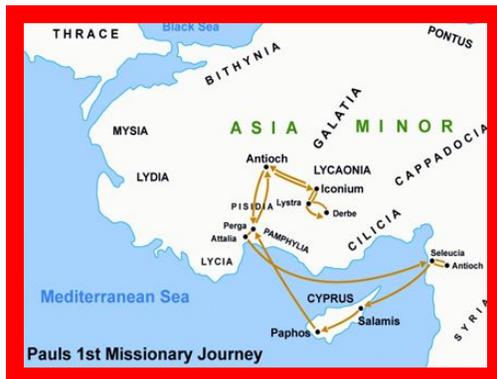
¹ 2 Timothy 3:1-9

More love is waiting for you at lunch, which will be immediately following our second service over in our Intersection Building. Please plan to join us so we can shower you with some further appreciation and gifts for all that you do in our communities.

But now it is time for us to worship our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ together.

As thankful as we are to have you visiting today, we are even more thankful that God's Spirit is present this morning. And we worship Him by singing and preaching His Gospel and submitting our hearts to its life-giving truth.

Last week we started a new study in Paul's letter to the Galatian churches. Galatians was written to a number of brand new Gentile churches that Paul had planted on his first missionary journey through modern-day Turkey.

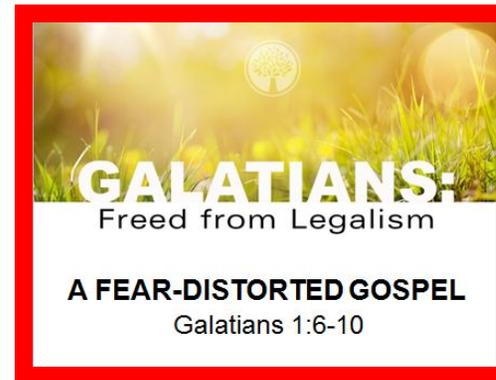


The new believers at Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia were all located in the region of Galatia, and would have received this letter from their founding missionary.

Last week we studied Paul's opening salutation, and noted his terse and urgent tone as he identified himself and reminded his audience of God's good news of salvation by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But now, instead of following his normal pattern of praise and thanksgiving for the church that he is writing to, **verses 6-10** consist of a stinging rebuke to the Galatians.

Paul is astonished that they have departed from the true Gospel of God, and so quickly embraced a false gospel distorted by fear.



You will find our text on page **761** of the Bibles we've handed out this morning. Please stand with me now in

honor of God's Word as I read from the **English Standard Translation** starting in **Galatians 1, verse 6**:

⁶ 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— ⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

So reads God's Holy Word. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

The human heart was made to worship. Every person created in the image of God is controlled by a worshipping heart. We all worship something or someone. The truth is that every human being is religious by their very nature. It's just a matter of which system of worship we espouse.

According to Dr. Google, as of 2014 there were approximately 4,200 different religions in the world.²

²

<https://www.reference.com/world-view/many-religions-world-8f3af083e8592895>

Page **4a** of 14

Close by 9:15 / 11:45

But God simplifies all of that for us. According to the Word of God, there are actually only two different kinds of religion in the world today.

Only Two Kinds of Religion	
Religion of Human Achievement	Religion of Divine Accomplishment
Justified by Man's Work	Justified by God's Work
Performance-Oriented Righteousness	Promise-Oriented Righteousness
Pride	Humility
False Gospel	True Gospel

All of the religions in the world fit into one of these two categories: Either it's a religion of human achievement, or it's a religion of divine accomplishment.

All the false religions in the world – from the most sophisticated philosophies of higher learning to the animalistic beliefs of jungle tribes – can rightly be categorized as being religions of human achievement. Because the worshipper is made right, or justified, by something that he or she does or doesn't do. Their righteousness is based on their performance, thereby showing themselves worthy of praise or everlasting reward.

But the true gospel of Jesus Christ is the religion of Divine Accomplishment. This is the true Good news of

Page **4b** of 14

Close by 9:15 / 11:45

Start by 8:38/11:08 // half by 8:57 / 11:27

how we can be saved and made right through the finished work of God Himself. We are saved only by believing in His promise – apart from any deserving.

This is the true Gospel of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. And it is available to all who humble themselves in true repentance, and turn from their self-reliant pride.

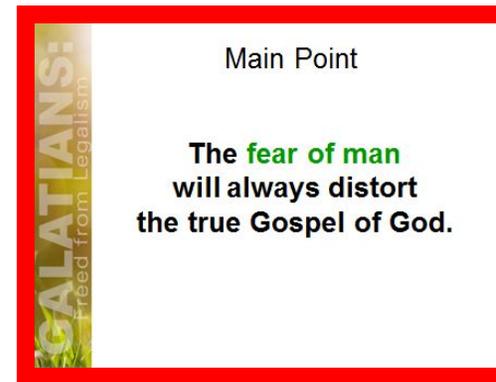
The Apostle Paul knew there are really only 2 different religions in the world. And not only will every worshipping heart embrace one of these religions, but Satan, and our culture, and our own pride are constantly pressuring our hearts towards the religion of human achievement.

So Paul wasn't surprised that the true Gospel would come under attack. He had preached the true gospel of salvation by Divine accomplishment to the Gentiles in Galatia.

But look at **verse 6**. What did surprise Paul was how quickly the Galatian believers were deserting the true Gospel to try again to become righteous by their own obedience to the law. What could motivate such a quick departure from grace?

The answer in today's text is, the fear of man. People-pleasing. Codependency. Peer pressure. People needing others to tell them who they really are. The fear of man.

And this is a powerful lesson that we all must learn this morning, since



The fear of man will always distort the true Gospel of God.

Always. Whatever you fear will control you. And living to please people will always lead to Gospel distortion.

Look over at **verse 11 of chapter 2**. Here Paul recounts how Peter – the leading apostle over the Jewish church – had visited the Gentile believers in Antioch of Syria and had enjoyed sweet fellowship with the believers there – until some Jewish believers showed up causing him to – how does **verse 12** say it?

He drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

Now notice. What motivated Peter to withdraw from enjoying his fellowship with the Gentile church?

His fear of what others would think of him, right? He feared the Judaizers, and notice how **verse 13** explains the fallout – all the rest of the Jewish believers followed Peter’s hypocrisy – creating real division in the church!

Peter’s fear of man led to racism. And the true gospel of God’s love for all people was distorted.

This is no small concern for us church.

False gospels often travel the road of people-pleasing.

So how much do you care what other people think about you? Have you considered how your fear of people affects your understanding of the true Gospel of God?

Please listen humbly to Paul’s warning in **verses 6-7**. The fear of man will always distort the true Gospel of God,



Because the fear of man calls us to law more than grace (6-7)

Paul is bewildered or amazed by the favorable response the believers were giving the false teachers.

Paul writes in **verse 6**,

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ.

Notice they weren’t just leaving the message of grace – they were voluntarily deserting from the God of grace Himself – transferring their allegiance and loyalty to back to their own ability to keep the Jewish law.³

You might underline these two words in **verse 6** – “Deserting” and “turning.” These are strong words.

There are only two religions in the world – and you can’t ride the fence of both. When they decided that God’s grace wasn’t sufficient for their salvation, they returned to a religious system of trying to justify themselves through their own obedience and culture.

Here’s what the false teachers were preaching. First you had to believe on Jesus Christ to be saved. But then they insisted simple faith in Jesus Christ was not enough. Something additional to faith was required. Every believer in Christ also needed to be physically circumcised. The false teachers said to be saved you still needed to add the requirements and rituals of the Old

³ Galatians 4:9-10; 5:4

Covenant to the New Covenant, and become a Jew culturally.⁴

Listen, is there anyone here today that doesn't like math? Well write this down my dear math-hating friends –

Arithmetic always destroys the Gospel.

That's right! Anytime you add to, or subtract from, God's grace – you utterly destroy it.

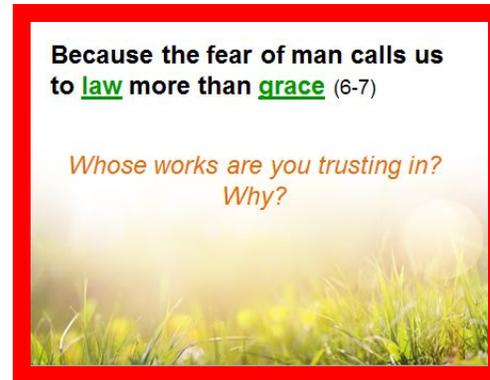
Verse 7 makes it clear – these trouble-makers were preaching a different so-called gospel that isn't able to save. There's only one true Gospel – and it's the good news of how God's grace saves whosoever believes that Jesus Christ became a man – lived a perfect and sinless life – and then went to the cross as the substitute for all who believe on Him. Jesus died the death our sins deserved, and rose again to secure our future resurrection and eternal life forever in the presence of our Heavenly Father.⁵

God's grace saves whoever believes this good news.

Are you trusting in Christ's finished work for the forgiveness of your sins today?

⁴ Acts 15:1, 5

⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:3-4



Whose works are you trusting in? And Why?

If you're more concerned with "looking stupid," than sinning before a holy God – you have caved to the fear of man and trust in the culture of your community for your spirituality.

People-pleasing will lead you to submit to the authority of your community for how Christians should dress, talk, worship, and love. And you will trust that you are a fine spiritual specimen as long as you have the approval of your community.

But loved ones – God has not called you to place your trust in such outward performance.

Would you like to have a little test this morning to see whose works you are really trusting in for your standing with God?

Ok. I'm going to start a sentence, and I'd invite you to finish it for yourself:

Because the fear of man calls us to **law** more than **grace** (6-7)

*Whose works are you trusting in?
Why?*

Test:

I know my sins are forgiven and I'm going to heaven when I die because...

I know my sins are forgiven and I will go to heaven when I die because...

Finish the sentence ...Answer honestly.

I know my sins are forgiven and I will go to heaven when I die because...

*Because I've been baptized., or
Because others truly believe I'm saved. Or even...
Because I'm a good person and even serve my
community as a first-responder!*

Dear friend – any answer that has anything to do with something you have done yourself betrays that you are trusting your own works for your salvation.

You must repent today from believing that any of your good works can earn God's grace.

The only right answer to this question is:

because... I've been born again by the Spirit of the Living God. (Romans 8:15-17)

Or **Galatians 2:20**: *I've been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.*⁶

In other words – you must never trust in your own external law-keeping – regardless of how approving others are of you.

Because, as Paul goes on to explain in the next verses,

Because the fear of man respects **popularity** more than **principle** (8-9)



the fear of man respects popularity more than principle. (8-9)

You see, when these false teachers from Jerusalem showed up, they must have really impressed the new

⁶ Galatians 2:20; c.f. Romans 8:15-17; 2 Timothy 1:12; 1 John 5:13

believers with all their spiritual credentials and education. After all – they and their families had been serving the Lord for hundreds of years. Certainly they knew better than these Gentiles who had only started to read the Scriptures just a short time ago.

The Galatians would have desired to please such esteemed and popular teachers. And so their fear of man opened the door to Gospel distortion.

So in **verse 8** Paul creates a hypothetical situation of the most respectable messenger that he can imagine, saying,

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.

The word here is “anathema.” Let him be devoted to destruction by God.

Now you need to know that from **Hebrews 2:2**, the Jews believed that the law of God was delivered by angels. So Paul says even if the angels showed up and gave you a different way to be saved than the grace of God – or if I myself came back and told you there’s more you have to do in order to really be saved...such a message is devoted to eternal death. Don’t believe such a messenger – no matter how respectable or popular they may be!

Verse 9 – 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.

In other words – Paul had warned these churches that false teachers would come.⁷ But their desire to earn the favor of these respectable teachers clouded their discernment and caused them to embrace a cursed gospel.

Let’s diagram the fear of man for us and see if we can better understand how happens in our own hearts.



The fear of man has two controlling motives – like two sides of the same coin. There is the lust for approval connected with a fear of rejection.

So the people-pleaser never really loves people – because in their mind they *need* people. They need love

⁷ Acts 14:22

and acceptance and approval from others in order to feel good about themselves. But notice how this need to be approved by others enslaves a person to the fear that we might do something that would cause this person to reject us. And being rejected by others only proves me to be the loser that I suspected I was all along.⁸

In short, the people-pleaser fears the displeasure of man more than he fears the displeasure of God...because he is looking for man's approval more than he is seeking the approval of God.

But do you see how the fear of man makes other's opinions of us an idol? And we will always become like what we worship.

Why is this so important to Gospel purity?

Well because the fear of man always distorts the true Gospel of God.

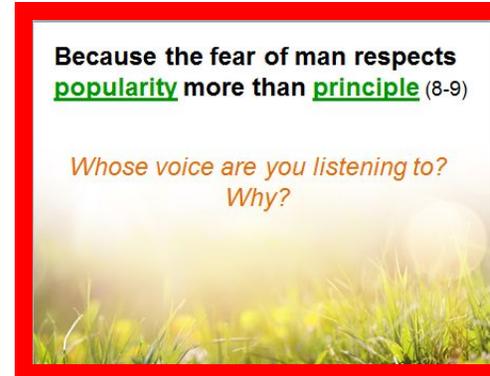
If you are trying to win another person's approval, how will you tell them the truth that they are sinner condemned to an eternity of horrific judgment except they repent and put their faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ?

⁸ I am indebted to Edward T. Welch's very helpful work on the fear of man in his highly recommended books, *When People are Big and God is Small* and *What do you think of me? Why Do I Care?*

If you fear being rejected by others – how could you boldly share how God's grace has delivered you from sin's penalty and power?

People pleasing always sacrifices truth on the altar of popularity. The Galatians wanted the approval of the popular false teachers, and began to add human works to grace.

So let me ask you this morning,



Whose voice are you listening to? And Why?

Just because a preacher is popular does not make his message true.⁹

How do you determine who you can trust?

Like the Bereans in **Acts 17:11**, you must evaluate their teaching with the Scriptures, right?

⁹ Matthew 7:13

Ask yourself – what do they teach is man’s greatest problem, and God’s solution for that problem?

Because the fear of man respects **popularity** more than **principle** (8-9)

*Whose voice are you listening to?
Why?*

Test:
What is man’s greatest problem?
What is God’s solution to this problem?

According to the Scriptures – man’s greatest problem is sin.¹⁰ And God’s solution to this problem is His undeserved grace.¹¹ Only God’s grace can bring forgiveness to the humble heart who repents of self-trust and believes on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for his life.

But this is very different from some of our most popular preachers today, right? According to many, man’s greatest problem is poverty. Or self-image. Or his past. Or his psyche.

Or when you listen carefully, you may hear that God’s cure for our problems is found in modern managerial techniques, or church growth, or the family, or biblical

¹⁰ Ephesians 2:1-3

¹¹ Ephesians 2:4-10; Romans 5:20

community, or political power, or even in quiet meditation and solitude.

Friends – all of these problems are real. And these solutions each have their place. But if you are listening to a voice that emphasizes any problem or cure above our sin and God’s unmerited grace – then it is a contrary gospel – and they are troubled preachers proclaiming a cursed gospel.

Verse 10 goes on to punctuate Paul’s point for us. People-pleasing will always distort the true gospel of God’s grace,

Because the fear of man seeks approval from **others** more than **God** (10)



Because the fear of man seeks approval from **others** more than **God**. (10)

It’s very likely that the false teachers were trying to discredit Paul’s gospel by telling the Galatians that Paul was just a people-pleaser. He must not have wanted to tell you that you needed to become a Jew in order to be

saved. But we're here from Jerusalem now to set the record straight.

So Paul's response leaps off the page in **verse 10**,

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

Paul's point is clear enough. As a former Pharisee – Paul was well acquainted with the religion of human achievement – always wearing the right things, saying the right things, and not be found in association with anyone who may taint his holiness in any way.

But now – after all that he had suffered in Galatia for the sake of preaching the Gospel, how could he be accused of fearing man?

So **verse 10** sets the record straight. People pleasers are not martyrs. The fear of men and the fear of God are mutually exclusive. Whoever you fear will control you. You can't seek the approval of people and the approval of God at the same time. You can only serve one master.

This is absolutely critical for the purity of God's true gospel. All true slaves of Christ do not seek man's approval. For the true gospel of God is neither popular nor approved by unsaved men.

So again as a way of application, I ask you,



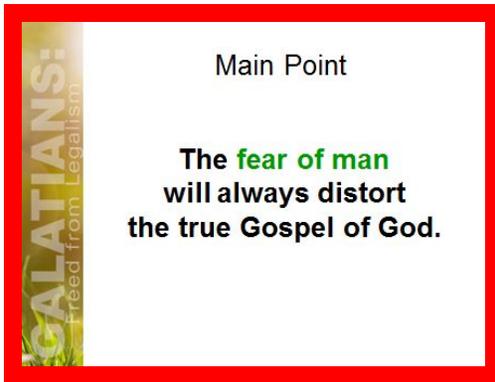
Whose approval are you seeking? Why?

Who are you most trying to please with ... your life? Your ministry? Your evangelism? Your financial stewardship? Your career? Your community service?

Whose approval do you most need, and why?

How you answer these questions reveals who controls your life. You are either living to please yourself and others, or you are living to please God.

Paul's warning here to the Galatians is one we must heed today.



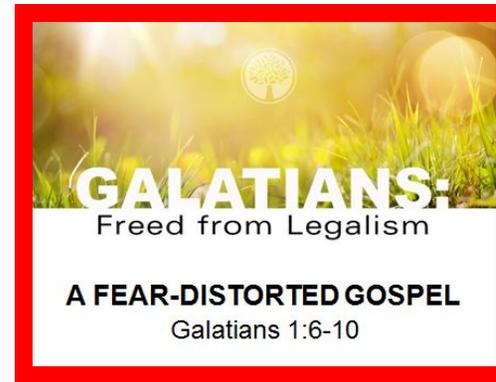
The fear of man will always distort the true Gospel of God.

And remember, there's only two kinds of gospels in the world. The true Gospel of divine accomplishment – the good news of our salvation by God's grace alone. And the many distorted false gospels of human achievement.

So ask yourself these questions this week:

Whose works are you trusting in? Whose voice are you listening to? Whose approval are you most seeking? And why?

Examine the allegiance of your soul, and make sure that fear of man is not distorting your joyful rest in the true Gospel of God.



Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed, **Benediction**



Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, ...according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.
Romans 16:25-27



- *When People are Big and God is Small*, Ed Welch
- *Pleasing People*, Lou Priolo

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read Proverbs 29:25. Discuss how and why “people-pleasing” is always a snare or trap to avoid.
2. Read 1 John 4:18-19. How would you help someone understand the difference between loving people, and fearing people?
3. What can make a false gospel like the one the Galatians heard so attractive? What can make the men who preach it so believable? How are we to protect ourselves and others from doing what the Galatians had begun to do?
4. Read 1 Corinthians 4:3-4. How much importance did Paul give to what others thought of him? Why?
5. When are you most tempted to soften or distort God’s truth when you are talking or ministering to others? Discuss some of your motivations or temptations in these regards, and pray together that God will help 2 Corinthians 5:9 to become your true heart’s desire.

Recommended Resources on A Fear-Distorted Gospel:

- 1 Samuel 15:24
- Psalm 40:4; 56:3, 10; 118:6
- Proverbs 29:25
- Isaiah 51:12-13
- John 12:42-43
- Acts 5:29; 15:24
- Romans 16:17
- 1 Corinthians 4:3-4
- 2 Corinthians 11:3-4
- Galatians 5:7-8, 10; 6:12
- Ephesians 6:6
- 1 Thessalonians 2:4-6
- Hebrews 13:6
- <http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/lay-aside-the-fear-of-man>
- <https://bradbigney.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/bigney-worry-fear-student-notes-blanks-filled-in.doc>
- *What do you think of me? Why Do I Care?*, Ed Welch