

Text: Gal. 1:10-24

Title: The goal of a false gospel is to please men

Time: 2/17/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The poet Robert Frost is one of the icons of our American heritage that we are proud to claim as our own here in New Hampshire. He has a good name, certainly, for living here. I did not know what a frost heave was until I moved to the state that Robert Frost called home.

Moving here was a big decision for our family. We were very comfortable in South Carolina, but the Lord had put a burden on our hearts for churches like New Boston Baptist Church in New England. In choosing whether to come to New Hampshire or to stay in South Carolina, it was clear that we could not do both.

Frost, of course, wrote a poem about those kinds of decisions that we have to make in life called "The Road Not Taken." It goes like this:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay

In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Frost is clear that when it comes to a decision between two paths in life, sometimes you simply cannot choose both.

Paul makes the same point about a choice that every believer must make as a gospel witness. We have to choose one way or the other; we cannot do both. Paul mentions that choice in the first verse of our passage (v. 10).

Newer translations indicate that when Paul asks “Do I persuade men or God?”, he is looking for the answer “God,” and so they translate the word *persuade* as *seek to please*. That is clearly the point of the second phrase, “Or do I seek to please men?” There Paul clearly is looking for a *no* answer. We must please God, not men.

But I think the KJV has it correct when they allow for the answer *men* to the first question. The word Paul uses here means *to persuade*, and everywhere in the New Testament, where Paul is persuading someone, he is doing so to men, not God. In fact, 2 Cor. 5:11 makes very clear that this is not something he would do with God.

So simply put, as a gospel witness you and I have a choice to make that Paul describes with two questions – (1) will we

try persuading men with the true gospel or God with the changes that we want to make to the gospel, and (2) will we seek to please men or please God.

The goal of false gospels is always to persuade God that the true gospel has to be adjusted so that it can become more pleasing to men. Paul says this is not the right strategy, and he explains why in this passage.

Notice 4 reasons we should not seek to please men with adjustments to the true gospel.

I. Do not seek to please men because the gospel makes us slaves of Christ (v. 10).

Illustration: Every enterprise has a proprietor and employees. The proprietor is the boss, and the employees are supposed to do what the boss says. This was especially true in the master-slave relationship of the first century world.

Application: The Greek word for *slave* comes from the verb that means *to bind*, and so a slave is someone who is bound, not free.

When it comes to the soul-saving enterprise of gospel ministry, Christ is the Lord of the harvest, and we are the slave-laborers in the harvest field. He told us what to do and what to say as His witnesses, and to the degree we fail to do and to say that, we shall fail in our calling to the harvest field.

The nice thing about being a slave, however, is that all that I have to worry about is being obedient. It is up to the proprietor of the business to worry about being successful. Understanding that we are mere slaves in this gospel work

relieves us from having to worry whether we will be appropriate or timely or well-received or successful. We just do what Jesus says to do, become what He says to be, and say what He says to say.

Has our gospel ministry been hindered by our disobedience to the Lord of the harvest in some area of our life? Every never-dying soul was at stake when Christ was asked to obey; in the wisdom of God's, many of those souls are at stake when it comes to our obedience as well. Do not seek to please men because the gospel makes us slaves of Christ.

II. Do not seek to please men because the gospel is not a human message (vv. 11-12).

Illustration: My wife and I enjoyed a movie together this past week about the making of the Walt Disney film *Mary Poppins*. For a number of reasons that the movie delves into, Walt Disney had a very hard time obtaining the rights to the Mary Poppins story from the author of that book.

In the scene in which he finally convinces the author to give him the rights, he explains to her that it is the job of storytellers to use imagination to restore order and hope to a suffering world. When the film ended, I remarked to my wife how impressed I was with the movie's insight that this world is in great need of the restoration of order and hope.

Application: But looking back we know, what Disney himself must have known at some level, that the Disney production of *Mary Poppins* has failed to restore order and hope to this suffering world.

In fact, no story, philosophy, achievement, or product of man's imagination, ingenuity, or ability will ever be able to do so. What the world needs is the word from heaven and

heaven's God. That word never pleases men. In fact, that needed word is more often than not quite displeasing to men.

Paul explained why in 2 Cor. 1:20-24, "Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God."

Human nature seeks a sense of self-worth; the gospel says humans are sinners who have earned God's judgment.

Human nature seeks therapeutic comfort; the gospel says humans need to be legally justified before God's law.

Human nature seeks recognition of personal achievement; the gospel says that humans must be saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in the achievement of Christ alone.

Human nature seeks independent opinion; the gospel requires the faith of a dependent child.

For all of these reasons, we must not seek to please men in our gospel ministry. Our task is similar to that of the cancer doctor. In love, we proclaim what people need to hear that they may be saved, not what they want to hear.

Do we preach Christ crucified, or are we more concerned about validating a sinner's sense of self-worth, desire for comfort, recognition of achievement, and personal opinion?

III. Do not seek to please men because the gospel does miracles that man cannot do (vv. 13-16a).

Application: Man would say that there is no chance that Paul would ever become a Christian. God's miracles dictated that it happen anyway. He separated Paul from his mother's womb (note it was Paul in the womb, not a tissue mass); He called Paul in His grace; He decided to reveal His Son in Paul and by Paul to the Gentile nations; and so Paul became a Christian through the supernatural miracle-working power of the gospel.

Whom do you and I know who has no chance of ever becoming a truly born-again Christian? To the degree we know someone like that, we have succumbed to the temptation to please men rather than to trust the power of God. We have forgotten that salvation is a miracle that no man can do, nor undo.

Paul cites a powerful temptation to please men in verse 14 that I would like to highlight this morning: "the traditions of my fathers." How many do we fear will never listen to our gospel message because they are too loyal to the sincere but mistaken religion of their fathers? Paul understood the hold that this family tradition can have on the human heart of unbelief, but still God's power saved him, and he believed it could do so for others.

Do we believe in this power, or have we concluded that there is something it cannot do?

IV. Do not seek to please men because the gospel is for God's glory, not our own (vv. 16b-24).

Illustration: In 2015 Pope Francis visited Philadelphia. One news report noted that 9,900 hotel rooms were booked for the event, trains from New Jersey ran at double their normal capacity, 25 miles of highway were closed, 591 cars were towed away from the secure-vehicle zone, 423 medical needs were treated at first aid stations, half-a-million people were expected for the Friday night Christian rock concert, and a million people were expected for the mass celebration on Saturday.

Secret Service personnel were present at an undisclosed cost, the Pennsylvania National Guard was there at a cost to taxpayers of \$9 million, and the fund-raising goal for the events was \$45 million, \$12 million of which was to cover costs incurred by the city of Philadelphia.

Application: That event was much ado about the glory of a preacher of a false gospel.

Paul describes a very different paradigm when it comes to the relative importance of preachers who preach the true gospel. Says Paul: they are mere flesh and blood (v. 16b), they need not be asked for permission for me to share the gospel (vv. 17-20), and when I share the gospel it is ok if no one recognizes me (vv. 21-23).

The only thing that matters for the true gospel preacher is this: "They glorified God by me." Said differently, they were amazed that God could take one so wretched as Paul, the chief of sinners, and save and use him so completely.

That is the reputation each and every one of us ought to strive for as preachers of the gospel. Who glorifies God because of what God has done for you and for me?

Conclusion: Every gospel witness that the Lord has put on this earth for gospel ministry has this choice to make - Do I persuade men or God? Let's persuade men, not God. Do I please men or God? Let's please God, not men, so men can be saved in a way we could never imagine or accomplish ourselves.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching