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Welcome to the New Life Podcast, a ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's sermon, preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, [www.newlifeithaca.org](http://www.newlifeithaca.org). Now here's this week's sermon.

00:43

A reading from St. Paul's Epistles to the Galatians, chapter 1, verses 1 through 10. Paul, an apostle, not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead, and all the brothers who are with me to the churches of Galatia. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

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who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen. 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. Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

01:37

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preach to you, let him be accursed. 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. For am I now seeking to persuade men or God, or am I trying to please man?

02:07

If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ. This is the word of the Lord.

02:20

90th anniversary of one of the most significant events in church history and pretty significant even in terms of world history. In July of 1536, there was a young Frenchman who was traveling to Strasbourg in Germany and he spent the night in a little town. Now there's nothing remarkable about

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a young Frenchman traveling in 1536. But this particular young Frenchman, just a year before, had written a treatise. That treatise he wrote because there were some Christian believers, Protestant believers in France who were slaughtered by the governing authorities and were martyred. And after that occurrence, they were slandered. Lots of things were said about them in order to justify

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the killing in the eyes of the people. And so they were said to be Anabaptist anarchists and treasonous traitors to the crown. They were said to have had extreme views to justify their treatment. So this young Frenchman named Jean, he wrote a treatise. And the treatise wasn't all that long. But it basically made the defense of their beliefs that they were

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believing and teaching along the lines of what Western Christians had always believed, going back to Augustine and even to St. Paul. That young man, whom we have the surname Calvin, he wrote that treatise and it spread quickly because he had been trained well. He was trained in Paris at the Sorbonne and then later in Lyon as a lawyer. Back in those days, lawyers had training in

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biblical studies and in theology. So equipped with the skills he set out a systematic treatment of the Protestant faith, he wrote it to the King of France, who was named Francis, in order to make a defense for their faith. That treatise spread like wildfire throughout Europe, and though he did not want to be famous, fame nonetheless found him. So

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He desired not to be a pastor really, he desired not to be a leader of the Reformation. What he wanted to do was he wanted to go to a town called Strasburg. There was a pastor there, an older pastor named Martin Bootsitter, and he wanted to study with him, he wanted to be mentored by him, and he simply wanted to live a quiet life of study and use his pen, his writing, to benefit the Reformation. Well, on the way to Strasburg,

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He, by chance, or as Presbyterians would say, by providence, had to pass through Geneva. One would not normally pass through Geneva in those days. It was a backwater. It was not a place you would go to. It became what it is today because of this young Calvin. But he had to pass through there because there was a war, there were war going on between the Holy Roman Empire and German princes over the Protestant Reformation. So he had to go from a normal route through Geneva and he stayed the night.

05:36

Now when he was in Geneva staying the night, word spread that the young author of the Institutes was in town. And the lead pastor there, was named Guillaume Farrell, who I don't think has any relation to Will Farrell, the actor, but I guess it's possible. Same exact name. Farrell found out that Calvin was there, and he went to where he was staying in order to persuade him to stay in Geneva, not go to Strasbourg and help them with the Reformation.

06:05

They are in that town. And so, Pharrell went, he's a fiery guy, he went to Calvin and he used every tool in his rhetorical tool chest. He emptied all of the bullets in his arsenal and he used all of the logic he possessed, all the reason he possessed, all the arguments he could muster and Calvin would not be dissuaded. And so, Pharrell resulted to the last thing he could possibly do. He cursed him.

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Now what I'm about to say is not a profanity. It is literally what he said and he meant it literally. It's not blasphemy to say what I'm about to say if you mean it literally. But this is what he said to Calvin. He said, God damn your quiet study and repose.

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it as a profane insult. He took it for what the word said, that it was an imprecation and he wrote later, and this is in his introduction to his commentary on the Psalms, he wrote that he was struck with terror when Pharaoh said this. He took this as a divine imprecation and because of it he stayed in Geneva and the rest is history. Now, some would call that a come to Jesus moment.

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what a come to Jesus moment is. It isn't necessarily, the phrase is not necessarily used by religious people. It is used by all kinds of people to signify a conversation that is an admonition to change, an admonition to change direction and go a different way. You could say that Pharrell was having a come to Jesus with Calvin. He wanted him to not go to Strasburg, he wanted him to stay in Geneva. In the text today we have Paul's come to Jesus.

07:51

We have Paul getting very frank he's going to have a conversation with the Galatians that they have to change what they're doing and they have to correct their ways. And just like Pharrell, Paul also is cursing. In fact, they're

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Those curses signify the urgency of his message. And if you remember anything from this message, hopefully it will not be what I just said a few moments ago, it will be this. That this message to the Galatians is urgent. That's what I want you to take away. It is of life and death importance. It is very urgent. And the next passage that we'll read next week, we find Paul swearing. He swears an oath.

08:37

Why is Paul cursing and swearing? Because the message that he is delivering is of utmost urgency. It is of life and death importance. We're talking about eternal life or eternal death in the balance. And so the urgency with which he communicates is fervent and zealous. And that's what I want you to remember about today. This message as we come to Galatians, we come to what we've just been talking about. It is a fiery letter.

09:06

It is a terse letter. It is a letter that is fairly quickly in order to address a problem that Paul sees in Galatia that he needs to correct right away. And unlike Pharrell, who kind of saved the curse for the last thing, Paul says it upfront. He wants to immediately shock them into listening to him so they will hear his message and they will respond to what he's saying. And that message is that

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The grace of Jesus Christ alone is what saves us and there is no other gospel. So today we're going to pull out three things from this text mostly from 6 to 10 verses 6 to 10 but also pulling a little bit from verses 1 through 4. The three points that we're going to look at today are that the source of the gospel, the second is the exclusivity of the gospel and the third is the urgency of the gospel.

10:02

message. So first, the source of the gospel message. Paul here gets right into it. We talked about this two weeks ago with the first sermon of the series. He gets right into it. He dispenses with the pleasantries and he begins to immediately defend the source of his message. And so we see two things in this passage. We see not only the source of the true gospel, we also see the source of the false

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teachers. So why don't we start with that? We have identified that there are teachers that are spreading a false message. We see this in verse 6. says, I'm astonished that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different

gospel. Not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. So there are people who are coming and they are distorting the gospel of Christ.

11:01

and they are troubling them. We also see that these false teachers in verse 10 are accusing Paul of some things. They accuse him of several things and we'll get into it as we go through the letter. But we find in verse 10 that they are accusing him of two things. Persuading God and pleasing men. Now, man-pleasing was a big no-no in ancient culture. In Greco-Roman culture, and it kind of is still today, to do something just in order to please someone was a big faux pas.

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Man-pleasing, if someone was accused of man-pleasing, it was a stark accusation. It was one that would ruin your reputation and one that had to be defended. And so they're saying, Paul is, he's bringing you a message of watered down grace, of easy believism. He's giving you the sort of bait and switch that all you have to do is believe in Jesus and there's nothing added to it. He's doing this in order to please you. He's doing this in order to

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to win your favor. And the second thing that they were saying is they were calling Paul a God persuader. Now, persuading God is like magic. It's divination. It's in the ancient world. It is akin to trying to influence God through magical incantations or whatever means you can do it. And so they are saying that he's given you a message to please your ears and he's also trying to persuade God to change the truth.

12:29

So this is why Paul then switches and now begins to defend himself. Now just a little bit more about these false teachers. It's not said here but we'll pull out details throughout the letter. I'll just lay a few of them out for you now. These false teachers are said to have come from James and who they likely were were Pharisees who had converted to Christianity by basically

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accepting the fact that Jesus was Messiah and he rose from the dead but not really changing anything else about their religion. The Pharisees saw in Jesus' teaching and we saw this last summer when we went through the Sermon on the Mount. They saw in Jesus' teaching a lot of similarities to their own teaching. His approach to the law, his belief in the resurrection, his approach to many other things. And so over time some of these Pharisees saw, hey this Jesus character he's actually

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quite a refreshing teacher, especially in contrast to the Sadducees who denied most of this stuff. And so there were quite a few Pharisees who accepted Christ as Messiah and risen from the dead, but wanted to maintain their tradition of fastidious holding to the law of Moses. It's very likely that these are the false teachers that are coming and troubling people. They're coming up from Jerusalem and they're saying, we have the old time religion.

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We have the religion that comes straight from the Apostles, Peter, James, and John. And what we are telling you is that what Paul is sharing with you is a watered down gospel. It is an easy believism. You have to adhere to the law of Moses. You have to be circumcised. You have to keep food laws. You have to participate in certain festival days. So they're coming up and accusing Paul of being man pleasers and God persuaders.

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and they are attacking his apostolic authority. then immediately, very first word, Paul an apostle, dash. In a normal letter, we'll get into this in the third point, he would have a little bit more formulaic pleasantries, but he goes right into defending his apostleship. He says, my apostleship doesn't come from men or through a man, but directly through Jesus Christ. Paul,

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says the source of his gospel is directly from Jesus. is related to us in the story that we read in Acts chapter 9. In Acts chapter 9 we have Saul, which Hebrew is the Hebrew name for Paul. Saul and Paul are the same. So Saul is persecuting the church. He persecuted the church in Jerusalem and then he wanted to go and pursue Hebrew speaking believers in other cities. He started with Damascus.

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And so he obtained a letter from the high priest in order to go there to arrest them and bring them back so they could be interrogated and perhaps also stoned like Stephen was that we read about in Acts chapter 7. Now, this shows a lines up with what we know about Roman law and custom with regard to Jerusalem at this time. For several hundred years, Judea had a dispensation from Rome.

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that they had some sort of autonomy. One of the things that they had autonomy for was to protect the sanctity or the sacredness of their temple. In most aspects of life, the Roman government had authority, especially over capital crimes. This is why they had to go to Pilate in order for Jesus to be executed. But, particularly for profanation of the temple, they had authority to protect that. That's how

16:18

They were able to stone Stephen because Stephen was saying in a more explicit way, you don't have to keep the law of Moses. And now Paul is getting a letter from the high priest because Roman law also held that they could go to other jurisdictions and protect the sanctity of their temple. So this is kind of a test case. He's got a letter from the high priest. He's going to go to Damascus, the next country over, and see if they can successfully pursue Hebrew believers there. And if that works, they can go all over the empire.

16:49

So Paul is on the way to Damascus. And on the way to Damascus, he is blinded by the light. He is struck down by a light that is brighter than the sun. And he falls down. Some artistic depictions have them falling from a horse. It's more dramatic, I guess. We don't



know exactly. He falls down, and he hears a voice. And the voice says, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? And Paul replies,

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Who are you, And he says, I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. And in that instant, Paul is converted. He goes from the persecutor to the one who is preaching the resurrection of Christ. And so his assertion here is that he received this message directly from Jesus in this vision, in this interaction with the risen Lord. Now, here's an aside. I think there are two things we can draw from the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus.

17:49

And the first is, this is a perfect illustration of salvation by faith alone through grace alone. Right? There is no better illustration for the fact that we are not saved by any goodness in ourself, by any of our good works, than a person who is murdering Christians being converted without having turned his life around, without having gone to church or expressed anything. He is immediately converted. That is a perfect illustration that we are saved

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not by works, but by grace alone. This morning I was reading in Romans 5, and I think probably when Paul was writing Romans 5 he had his conversion in mind. Because he talks about how while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us. He's making the point that we didn't deserve to have someone die for us. He says in the passage in Romans 5 that people would scarcely die for a good person,

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But Christ died for us while we were enemies. We were shaking our fist at him. And Paul was even murdering other followers of Jesus. In the middle of that, he is converted and that illustrates the free grace of Christ that is given to us as a gift. And not because of anything we've done. And if the conversion of Paul doesn't illustrate that, I don't know what does. The second thing I think the conversion of Paul shows us is the truth of the resurrection of Jesus.

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If you accept that Paul existed, and I don't think there's any reason why we wouldn't accept that he existed. I don't know of any critical scholar who doubts that he existed. A lot of the historical details are described in Acts line up, like I was talking about the letters from the high priest. That is exactly what we know about Roman law. That was true. So we have no reason to doubt that Paul existed. If we accept this story in Acts 9 as a true story, that he did, in some experience, go from being a persecutor of the church to a preacher of the gospel,

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What other explanation can we give that he actually did see the risen Lord? His heart was actually changed by the Holy Spirit. For me, this is a proof, a solid proof of the truth, the reality, the historical reality that Christ really did raise from the dead. Like how else can you explain Saul the Pharisee, the murder of Christians, becoming the chief apostle? I don't think there's any other way to explain it other than Jesus Christ really did raise from the dead and he really did appear.

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And outside of that, I don't know how we explain his drastic change of heart and life. And as I said before, and I'll say again, if Christ really did raise from the dead, everything else falls into place. If it is true historically that Christ raised from the dead, all our other doubts melt away. Because if he raised from the dead, he proved himself to be what he said he was, which is the incarnate God who created all things.

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To me, this conversion moment by Paul is a very important thing to dwell on and reflect on of the truth of Christ's. So here's Paul. He says that he has the source of the message. These other false teachers do not have the source of the message. He has the source of the message. He received it directly from Christ when he had this vision that he appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Apparently, more was said to him by Jesus than was relayed there. He communicated the truth of the gospel.

21:11

called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles. And so Paul is asserting, I got it directly from Christ Himself. That is the source of the message. And so any other source that comes to you speaking a different gospel is a false source. Right? He goes and says, look, there are people who are coming to try to turn you to a different gospel. But there is no other gospel. He says that there are people who troubling you and distorting the true message.

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He goes on to say in verses 8 and 9, even if I were to come to you, like if I were to come to you in the future and preach to you a message different from the one that I preached to you at first, I'm wrong. If an angel were to come and say to you a gospel that is different from the one that I preached to you at first, the angel is wrong. I'm sorry. If the apostles, Peter, James, and John were to come to you and give you a different message other than the one that I gave to you at first, they are wrong.

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If anyone, he says in verse 9, would come to you and say these things, they are wrong. The only source that Paul asserts that the gospel comes from is Christ himself, and he is defending himself as an apostle of Jesus with the source of truth and the source of the message that they are to believe in and we are to as well. So the second thing we see is that the source of the gospel message and the second is the exclusivity of the gospel message.

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This is one of the things that we can't get around this text either. There is only one gospel. He says in verse 6 that they are trying to turn you to a different gospel. Verse 7, not that there is another one. There is no other one. There is no other gospel. There's only one. He says if anyone comes to you and says a different gospel, they are accursed. There is only one gospel. There is only one message. And anyone who distorts it and pollutes it is putting you in grave danger. This is one of the claims of Christianity, the exclusivity

23:10

of the message. Peter and John say in the book of Acts that there's only one name given under heaven whereby we can be saved. Only one name and that name is Jesus. Jesus himself says, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes unto the Father except through me. One of the claims of Christianity is an exclusivity. There's an exclusivity of Christ. There is an exclusivity of the gospel. And Paul is asserting that here. There are not other ones.

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There is no other person. It is only Jesus and his message of grace through his deliverance from sin. This is an uncomfortable truth to wrestle with, right? We all recognize exclusivity is an uncomfortable truth to wrestle with in a pluralistic society. So I want to point out a couple things. One of the things I want to point out is in verse six, we find the commentators saying this is actually a gentle admonishment. It may not seem very gentle.

24:10

But a lot of people have pointed this out including Martin Luther who I have in the bulletin here if you'll turn to page 3 Martin Luther says with regard to verse 6 Considering the vehemence of Paul in this epistle. This is a very mild and tender rebuke His purpose is to raise up those that are falling and with fatherly care to call them back again He then later says about verse 8 in contrast

24:40

Here Paul casts very flames of fire. So what's the contrast here? In verse 8, he is talking about teachers, right? He saves his fire for the teachers, those who are spreading the false message. To individual believers, he is much more gentle. We see this at the end of Galatians as well, in chapter 6, verse 1. He says, brothers, the same Paul, brothers, if anyone is caught in a transgression,

25:09

You who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. We do hold to exclusivity. We do believe that Christ is the only way. We do believe that there is only one gospel. And yet when we interact with others, we do so with gentleness. And Peter adds in his letter, and respect. This has been a consistent thing that I've been stressing with us as we interact with colleagues, friends, neighbors, family, in a pluralistic society.

25:36

We can't help but stand for the truth. can't help but, you know, we can't shy away from the exclusivity of what we are saying. But we do so with gentleness and we do so with respect. Nonetheless, the exclusivity of Christianity cannot be avoided. And, you know, the illustration or the parable of the blind man and the elephant comes to mind. Maybe you've heard this before. It talks about there's an elephant and there's

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various numbers of blind men and they go to learn about the elephant by touching. one touches the leg and he says this is a tree and another touches the trunk and he says this is a snake and others touch various parts of the elephant and say it's different things. You know and the point of the parable is supposed to say we've all got different parts of the truth and no one is right or wrong. But what I see in the parable is there is a truth it's an elephant right? Everybody's grasping at the truth.

26:33

But there is a truth, that is an elephant. And so what if the elephant itself came and said, here is what I am? Christianity's message is that the elephant, the truth, has come to share with us the truth. So in the parable, we have a revelation of what the elephant is. Christ says, I am the incarnate Son of the living God who created all things. And that exclusivity is not something we can

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get around or shy away from. And it is one that we need to share with our friends, our families, our colleagues, our neighbors with gentleness and respect. So the third thing.

We have the source of the message of the gospel. We have the exclusivity of the gospel message. And third, we have the urges.

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If there's anything you take away from this passage, is the urgency. Paul has what the commentators call a terse greeting. If we compare it to Ephesians, I just want to flip over. This is how Ephesians starts. Very formulaic, very standard. All the pleasantries are here. Paul, an apostle, cries Jesus by the will of God. Here we find Paul, an apostle, dashed not from men nor from man, so he gets into his argument right away. He can't help it, right? Let's go back to Ephesians.

27:58

Chapter one, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to the saints who are in Ephesus and are faithful in Christ Jesus. Here he just says, to the churches of Galatia. Doesn't call them saints. Doesn't say they're faithful. And then in verse two, he says, grace and peace from God our Father and from Lord Jesus Christ. He said this in verse three, grace and peace from God our Father and Lord Jesus Christ. And then he starts arguing, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age?

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This is a much different greeting than a typical greeting you would find in a Roman letter. He's getting right into it. And then, the next section of almost every letter would have a thanksgiving section for the recipients. In Ephesians, he says, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And he goes on for a whole chapter thanking God for them. There's no thanksgiving here for the Galatians. He goes right in to, am astonished. So this is terse, I think that put it mildly, the commentators.

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terse. It communicates the urgency. He's not waiting around for pleasantries. You know, if your kid's in the middle of the street and they're about to get hit by a car, you're not going to come and say, honey, I got something I'm going to tell you. You're going to grab them up. You're going to tell them to get out of the road, right? This is what's going on. He's getting

right into it. And the urgency is even magnified further with his curses and his oaths that he is taking. He wants to communicate this urgency. And he does it with a

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double curse. He says if we are an angel were to come and preach a different gospel let him be damned. Let me be damned. If I were to do it, let me be damned. If anyone would come, let them be damned. He is communicating a very stark urgency. This is where Martin Luther says he is breathing flames of fire in his zeal and that is true. He's not holding anything back and the reason is because it's urgent.

29:51

It is very urgent. This is a life or death matter. Eternal life, death are at stake. This is not something that we mess around with. This is not a nice stroll in the park. This is a very urgent life saving message that he is delivering to us. And that is we have to get the gospel right. We have to get the gospel right. There is no other gospel. We have to get it right. And if we don't get it right, we are in danger.

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Now, for those of us who are fastidious and meticulous, I want to set you at ease. If you're thinking about yourself and how you believe, what you think about the gospel, and worried that if you have one thing wrong, you're putting your life in danger, that's not what Paul is saying. Again, Paul's admonishment is for the teachers. His admonishment is for the teachers that they know what they're doing, they're supposed to know what they're doing, they're trained, they are called by God, that is where he is giving

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the stern part of the warning. But it is important, is of utmost importance that they be turned away from this gospel that includes works of the law, and we'll see this over the next few weeks, back to the pure gospel of grace in Jesus Christ by faith alone, through grace alone. And this is urgent. The urgency of this is communicated so very clearly that Paul wants to give this to them.

31:18

Sadly, this week, as we talked about in the prayer time, there was a very sad event that happened yesterday and actually the day before. And it's been on my mind, maybe it's been on your mind and heart. And as I think about warnings, as I think about saving people, I can't help but think about if we had an opportunity, and it could be any situation if this is still too near or close to you, if someone is in danger.

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If we had the opportunity to go and share the message that floodwaters are coming, we would go right into those bunks and into those dorms and start pulling people out and say, look, you've got to go 100 feet up the hill to safety. We wouldn't be pleasant. We would probably raise our voices because life and death is at stake. Brothers and sisters, that is the kind of urgency that Paul is communicating. And that is the urgency and the importance of the gospel.

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It's not just a thing we believe. It is the very means of life. It is the very means of our salvation. It is how we are delivered from this present and evil age. So as we go through this letter to the Galatians, remember Paul. He is seeking to come in and rescue us from a burning building. He is seeking to come in and rescue us from the danger of flood. He is coming in to communicate very urgently that we need to get this right. We need to be corrected. And so

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We should listen to this letter with that urgency as we go through. And I hope that an application that we will also take that urgency to take stock of our own hearts and our own lives and also to take as leaders, as parents, and as leaders also as we watch over those that we've been given charge to, little souls. also in general as we think about the gospel in our lives, I hope we will take that urgency and

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to our own hearts, our own flocks, and also our own congregation that we would be fastidious to proclaim the truth of the gospel of Jesus. Let's pray.