

"The One Thing that Cannot Be Improved"

Text: Galatians 1:1-12

God grant to each of us not only the gifts of grace, mercy, and peace, but a love for our neighbor that inspires us to share those same gifts also with those around us. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

Some of you might remember the hail-storm several years ago that totaled virtually every roof in and around Bismarck and Mandan. Interestingly enough I remember looking at the roof after that storm and thinking that it made it through the storm without much damage. The insurance adjuster quickly disabused me of that fantasy. What looked pretty good at first glance was actually a total loss – once you knew what to look for. Roofs that look pretty good can still leak like a sieve.

We also had an older Chrysler that we were driving back then. Even I could see that the hail had done quite a number on it. Again, the adjuster took one look at it and said simply, "*Totaled.*" This despite the fact that – unlike the church roof – the dented hood, roof, and fenders still did what they always did, and the car still ran as good as it ever had.

There are things like that in life, aren't there? Things that just aren't the same after something (or someone) messes with them. God's Word is like that – especially the gospel. You can't tinker with the gospel and then pretend that it is the same gospel. You can't distort God's Word and pretend that it still is the Word of God. To change it – in any way – is to damage or destroy it.

So it is on this Confirmation Sunday that we reexamine just how strong, and yet just how delicate, is that Word of God that we hold so dear. As our Confirmand this morning prepares to pledge her allegiance to *God's Word*, it is obviously critical that we define just what that Word of God is, and what it is not. Our text gives us valuable information in that regard. That text is God's Word recorded in the opening verses of Paul's Epistle to the churches in the region known then as Galatia:

ESV **Galatians 1:1-12** *Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead--² and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:³ ¶ Grace to you and peace from God our*

Father and the Lord Jesus Christ,⁴ who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father,⁵ to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.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.¹¹ ¶ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

These are God's words. They are therefore perfect, from first to last. How foolish it would be for us, once we come to recognize the source and value of these words, to ignore anything at all that they teach, or to seek to change the message when the original came from God himself. On the contrary, that our God would richly bless us through the study of *his* perfect words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

First a couple of seemingly random questions. Who invented the airplane? Most would say the Wright Brothers – Wilbur and Orville – yet many agree that others were actually first, including a New Zealander named Richard Pearse and a Brazilian named Alberto Santos-Dumont. Who invented the automobile? Again, most Americans would say Henry Ford. Good Germans in attendance today might know it was Karl Benz, whose company later came to be known as Mercedes-Benz. Who invented the telescope? Most popular answer: Galileo. The real credit goes to a Dutch-German lens maker named Hans Lippershey. The first light bulb? Not Albert Edison but a guy named Sir Humphrey Davy. Wilbur and Orville Wright, Henry Ford, Galileo, Edison – all of these and many others became famous not for inventing, but for improving the basic inventions that were already in existence.

In fact even today it is difficult to think of a single thing in life that cannot be improved upon. Virtually everything man makes will

eventually be improved. It will be made lighter, stronger, easier to operate, and more efficient. By the way, if you are wondering who actually *did* invent the internet, the original idea was actually the brainchild of Nicola Tesla, not Whatshisname.

It should therefore come as no big surprise that man naturally supposes that the same rule holds true for religion. Man naturally believes that religions can – and must – always be evolving, and that every religion can always be improved. They believe this to be true, in part, because they believe that religions *were created by man for man*. Since man is also evolving – or so they also believe – religion must evolve with him.

Surprisingly enough, many Christian churches themselves are promoting a kind of religion that changes to "meet the changing needs" of the people it seeks to serve. More accurately, they seek to create a religion that justifies whatever they desire and requires only what they are willing to provide.

Understand, first of all, exactly what has to happen to God for this idea to work. God has to be removed from his throne and placed at the foot of man. He has to be demoted from the *creator* of *his own* laws to the enforcer of the laws of *man*. Where God was once acknowledged as the One who decided what is right and what is wrong, man now decides such things, and God is required to judge man according to man's ever-evolving standards, his ever-changing rules. Where God once condemned fornication, for example, man has now declared such conduct to be acceptable, and *God* is required not only to overlook that sin, but to look favorably on those who practice it.

The Christian faith is perhaps the one thing in all creation that simply cannot be improved upon. As soon as man begins to tinker with any part of it, he destroys all.

If this sounds extreme to your ears, consider Paul's words in our text for this morning. Those of you who are familiar with Paul's Epistles will perhaps recall that Paul routinely began his letters with a rather lengthy section of encouragement and praise for those to whom the letter was addressed. This was even true when he wrote to mixed-up congregations like the church in Corinth. The one exception where he offered not one word of praise by way of introduction was our text for this morning – Paul's verbally inspired letter to the churches in Galatia. Notice in our text how he briefly greets his target audience, and then launches immediately into a rock-hard condemnation. Why? Listen again to verse 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." In Corinth, Christians were conducting their worship services in a disorderly manner. In Galatia they were actually distorting – and thereby destroying – the Christian faith itself. In fact Paul spells out in our text exactly what happens when you alter or distort God's word: **"(You) 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."**

"Distorting the gospel of Christ"? That doesn't sound all that bad, does it? They were just tweaking it a little bit. Maybe customizing it to better suit their local needs. Listen again to how Paul addressed such "harmless" distortion: **"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."**

This is the strongest language you will ever hear from Paul. So what were the people doing that was so bad? They were not brazenly denying the existence of Jesus; they were just adding a few good works into the mix of how someone is really saved – most notably: **"Believe in Jesus AND be circumcised."** Doesn't seem all that bad, does it? So why did Paul come down so hard on them?

Because adding good works to the gospel destroys it. Utterly. Adding man's works to what Jesus alone accomplished destroys God's salvation plan for mankind.

How? Why? Because you really can't believe in Jesus Christ AND believe that something is required of, or must be provided by, man. Some might be wondering about faith. Doesn't faith have to be provided by man? Not at all. Faith resides *in* man, but it too is provided by the Holy Spirit. Faith is a gift given to man. In fact the beauty of the gospel is that it tells us that absolutely nothing is required of man. Everything good is provided by Jesus Christ. Good thing that's how it is, isn't it, since man is utterly incapable of providing payment for even one sin? The idea that man must add even one good thing before he can be saved does not improve the Christian faith, it destroys it – and in the process anyone who so believes condemns himself. Hear that again: Add any requirement at all to the Christian faith that *man* has to provide, and the gospel itself is destroyed and heaven is lost.

The folks that were distorting the gospel in Galatia were evidently justifying their actions with the argument that Paul was simply mistaken in what he had told them, or that he had inadvertently left some things out. Did you notice how Paul dealt with that argument? He began by giving his credentials: ***Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.*** He then concludes with these words: ***For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel.*** ¹² ***For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.***" We can trust God's Word precisely because it is God's Word. God doesn't make mistakes. But man does. In fact man corrupts everything he touches.

What then exactly *is* that truth of God that those trouble-makers in Galatia were perverting or distorting? It is simply this – human beings have nothing to offer God as payment for sin. We therefore have two options: never sin, or, if you do sin, find someone else to pay for that sin. Obviously everyone here this morning has sin – whole busloads of the stuff. Every single one of us therefore needs an outside source of goodness to satisfy the demands of our sin. The gospel – the "good news" – is that that is *exactly* why Jesus Christ came to earth. It's what he came to do. By living the perfect life that the law demanded, and then giving up that life as the sacrifice or payment for sin, Jesus provided for you and me what we could never provide for ourselves – the acceptable, complete payment for every single one of our sins. That payment is credited to you and me not by doing something; it is ours the moment the Holy Spirit causes us to believe that it is true – creates faith in our hearts that Jesus did what he said he did.

This is the Christian faith, not "*man must*" but "*Jesus has.*" In fact as soon as you add any "*man must*" you destroy "*Jesus has.*" That is why Paul was so adamant in his rejection of every distortion of the truth of how man is saved. God's plan saves; no perversion of that plan ever could or ever will.

This is our great joy and confidence, and it is concerning this faith that our Confirmand this morning pledges her agreement and allegiance. This is her hope for salvation – God's plan, freely provided to each one of us in Jesus Christ. And yet as our Confirmand gives expression of her faith this morning and thereby confirms her trust in the faith in which she was baptized, you and I will also recommit ourselves to this truth. More than that, we would also do well to fall on our knees before our God every morning, begging him to preserve this gospel truth in our hearts.

Every single generation possesses the terrible power to destroy the gospel by twisting or distorting it. Recommit yourselves therefore this morning to the pure, undistorted, saving truth of how we are saved. Rejoice in the simple truth that ***"God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."***

May God so bless our Confirmand, and may God so bless each of us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

ESV **1 Kings 8:22-43** Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel and spread out his hands toward heaven, ²³ and said, "O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you, in heaven above or on earth beneath, keeping covenant and showing steadfast love to your servants who walk before you with all their heart, ²⁴ who have kept with your servant David my father what you declared to him. You spoke with your mouth, and with your hand have fulfilled it this day. ²⁷ ¶ "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built! ²⁸ Yet have regard to the prayer of your servant and to his plea, O LORD my God, listening to the cry and to the prayer that your servant prays before you this day, ²⁹ that your eyes may be open night and day toward this house, the place of which you have said, 'My name shall be there,' that you may listen to the prayer that your servant offers toward this place. ⁴¹ ¶ "Likewise, when a foreigner, who is not of your people Israel, comes from a far country for your name's sake ⁴² (for they shall hear of your great name and your mighty hand, and of your outstretched arm), when he comes and prays toward this house, ⁴³ hear in heaven your dwelling place and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to you, in order that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your people Israel, and that they may know that this house that I have built is called by your name.

ESV **Luke 7:1-10** After he had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. ² Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. ³ When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. ⁴ And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, ⁵ for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." ⁶ And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. ⁷ Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. ⁸ For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." ⁹ When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." ¹⁰ And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.

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Confirmation Sunday – June 3, 2018

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 528 (Verses 1-4, 6) (Red Hymnal)

"If God Himself Be for Me"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (1 Kings 8:22-43) Our first Scripture reading tells of King Solomon's prayer as he dedicated the temple he had just built. This morning, on Confirmation Sunday, we apply this reading and his words to our youth – especially this morning our Confirmand. Confirmation is a milestone, not a final destination. That means it is a step on a very long journey. So we ask our God to keep his eyes turned to each of his children, night and day, and to hear our prayers and protect us until he calls us home.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 33)

The Second Lesson: (Luke 7:1-10) We can ask for no greater gift from our God than strength of faith. The Bible teaches us that even a spark of faith is powerful enough to save, but God's children should want more than that. This lesson speaks of the only time listed in the Bible where Jesus was astonished at the faith of a human being. God grant to each of us – and especially this morning the Church's youth – the sort of faith that simply takes God at his Word, as did the Centurion in this lesson.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – page 5. (Brown Hymnal)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 784 (Brown Hymnal)

"Lord, Take My Hand and Lead Me"

The Sermon – Text: Galatians 1:1-12 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"The One Thing that Cannot Be Improved"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Offering followed by the Prayers

The Confirmation Hymn -336 (Red Hymnal)

"My God Accept My Heart This Day"

The Confirmation of Erica Kaberline

The Pre-Communion Hymn -310 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Thy Table I Approach"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution -Hymn 315- (Red Hymnal)

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn -785 (Brown Hymnal)

"Children of the Heavenly Father"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking an altar at which to commune** – Since we desire to follow the words of our Savior, we practice "Close Communion" – a practice that is not new to confessional Lutherans. This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting them to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please first meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word.

Attendance - Sunday (35) Average (43) Wednesday (39)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/ Holy Communion
	-11:30 a.m.	– Fellowship Meal
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Sunday Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship and coffee time

CLC News – Pastor Mark Tiefel is considering the call to Luther Memorial of Fond du Lac, WI. Pastor Caleb Schaller is considering call to Berea of Inver Grove Heights, MN. Teacher Nathan Wales is considering the call to St. John's of Okabena, MN. Teacher Ann Sprengeler is considering the call to Redeemer of Cheyenne, WY.

Congratulations – Congratulations to our Confirmand this year, Erica Kaberline. All are invited to join us as we continue our celebration with a fellowship meal following the service this morning.

West Central Delegate Conference – Our thanks to those who gave of their time and treasure to host the recent Delegate Conference in Bismarck. Delegate conferences – especially on CLC Convention years – are extremely valuable elements of our kingdom work.