

# ***Losing My Religion***

## **1. Fake Good News**

February 4-5, 2017

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Today we are starting a new series of messages on the book of Galatians called *Losing My Religion*. If you have a Bible, please turn with me to the first chapter of Galatians. We've heard a lot about "fake news" these days, so I thought we'd have some fun and see how well we can spot fakes news. Guess which headlines are real or fake:

→ *River Rat burger all the rage in Russia* -- True or fake?

It's true!<sup>1</sup> Evidently, they've been munching on these large rodents in Russia lately.

→ *New Report Finds Americans Most Interested In Science When Moon Looks Different Than Usual*. What do you think, true or fake?

It's fake! That's from satire site, *The Onion*.

→ *Discovery of Prehistoric Corn Chips Turns Paleo Diet on Its Ear*

Fake!<sup>2</sup> Cave men didn't do guacamole dip either.

→ *New Halloween App lets Kids Trick or Treat from Safety of Home*

Fake!<sup>3</sup> That might happen someday, but not yet!

→ *Oregon man changes name to Captain Awesome*

True!<sup>4</sup> I guess he wanted people to think of him every time they said, "That's awesome."

→ *"Candidate's wife says re-elect him before he drives me crazy"*

True!<sup>5</sup> Charlyn Daughtery made a commercial asking Texas voters to give her husband Gerald something to do and get him out of the house. And he won!

It's fun to try to pick out those fake headlines because it doesn't really matter whether you guess right or not. It doesn't matter whether there's really a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nbcnews.com/video/-river-rat-burger-all-the-rage-in-russia-818270787586>

<sup>2</sup> [www.cap-news.com/section.php?id=health#sthash.189JCDdp.dpuf](http://www.cap-news.com/section.php?id=health#sthash.189JCDdp.dpuf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.cap-news.com/section.php?id=tech#sthash.fVDNjjlU.dpuf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2010/12/oregon-man-changes-name-to-captain-awesome/1#.WITClrYrJzg>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.today.com/video/texas-candidate-s-wife-to-voters-re-elect-him-before-he-drives-me-crazy-793891395531>

Halloween app or a guy named Captain Awesome. But fake news about how we get made right with God-- now that's another matter. Being misled about getting right with God can have eternal consequences. That's why the Apostle Paul wrote such a passionate, forceful letter to the believers in the region of Galatia. Someone was giving the Galatians fake news about how to find peace with God, and lives were at stake.

A few years before, the Apostle Paul and his team visited the region of Galatia, which is in modern day Turkey. They met people who sincerely wanted to know God, so he and his team shared the Gospel with them. Gospel = "good news" 1 Corinthians 15 says the Gospel is the good news that Jesus died to pay the price for the sins of the world, then rose again 3 days later and offers new life to anyone who puts their trust in him. The Galatians believed this good news that Paul shared, and they turned to follow Jesus. They were amazed and grateful that their sins had been forgiven when they put trust in Christ. They were excited to know they were God's children and would live forever with him. Their lives changed. They stopped worshipping idols and began loving Jesus and each other. Before Paul left town, a new and thriving church had been born.

But then, trouble. Some people came from Jerusalem and started spreading fake good news-- a false Gospel. They told the Galatians that believing in Jesus was great, but that if they really wanted to be accepted by God they had to *also* keep all the Jewish ceremonial laws. They had to stop eating meat from the markets and start eating only kosher foods. They had to start observing the festivals and get circumcised. In other words, they had to become Jewish. After all, Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. And the Galatians believed this fake good news. After all, these preachers were from Jerusalem, which is where Jesus rose from the dead and where the apostles lived. And the messengers sounded very authoritative - they were very confident they were right.

When Paul heard this he was alarmed and angry. He dashed off a letter to warn the Galatians that they were following fake good news and being led further away from God instead of toward him. ***Galatians 1:6-7*** *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—<sup>7</sup> which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ."*

Paul was blunt with the Galatians. He told them they were deserting truth and believing a fake gospel. He said those new preachers were perverting the Gospel... that is they took the true good news, and they twisted it out of shape so that it was no longer really good news. These teachers were called "Judaizers" because they were trying to make the Galatian believers Jewish, as well as followers of Jesus.

This still happens today. You and I will hear fake good news. We will hear a noble-sounding message of how to find peace with God that isn't true. It's a twisted version of the real good news of Jesus.

Here are some of the common versions of fake good news that you and I will hear:

### **Fake Good News: To get God's acceptance:**

#### **1) "Be a pretty good person"**

Maybe you've heard people say something like, "I try not to hurt people, and I do what I can to help out where I can. I've never murdered anyone and I'm kind to animals.... Compared to most people I'm a pretty decent person, and other people seem to think so too. So, I'm good with God." This is based on the idea that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell, so you better be good. It teaches that at the end of my life, I'll stand before God, and if I have done more good than bad, I'm in. This is a very common idea. It appeals to our senses of fairness.

But it is *fake good news*. It's not the real good news of the Gospel. For one thing, I can never tell when I have been good enough for God. How do I know that I have made the cut? I can never be sure. That's why when you ask some people if they are going to heaven they'll say "I hope so..." For another thing, What does it mean by good? Compared to what? Compared to a serial killer? OK, I'm better than that. Compared to Mother Teresa? I'm not as good as her. What's the standard?

The Bible says the standard of goodness is not other people, it is God. And he is perfect. But none of us are perfect - not even Mother Teresa. So we like to think that God will grade on a curve. The problem with the idea *that good people go to heaven is that there are no good people.* **Romans 3:12** says "*there is no one who does good, not even one.*" None of us can be good enough, because the standard is God, and none of us measure up: **Romans 3:23** "*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*" It is not good news to a paralyzed person that they will be loved if they run a 5k -- it is cruel because they can't do it. It is not good news to tell morally imperfect people like us that God will love and accept us if we're good people. It is not the Gospel.

Another version of fake good news is we will be accepted by God if we:

#### **2) "Believe AND be religious"**

This is the distorted gospel the Galatians fell for. They were told, "If you want to be saved, believe in Jesus AND keep the Jewish religious laws." The Galatians were told to keep the Jewish dietary laws: only eat kosher food. So they said, "OK, no more ham sandwiches for me". And then they were told "You've also got to celebrate the Passover if you really want to be Jewish; and then you've got to observe the Sabbath --- we'll give you a list of things you are

not allowed to do on the Sabbath...” And then they said, “Oh, and you have to be circumcised, too.” (That’s a high bar!) There were literally hundreds and hundreds of laws that it took to be a good Jew. The Judaizers were trying to get the Galatians to jump on the religious treadmill. Today we might hear, “Go to church, pray, help out, give. Believe in Jesus AND do these religious duties, *then* God will accept you and you’ll be saved. But religious duties don’t save us. We hear, “You need to get your baby baptized so it will go to heaven.” But baptism is not what gets a baby to heaven.

This is a fake good news. We are not saved by our religious duties. **Ephesians 2:8-9** “ *For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—<sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast.*” Our salvation is a gift of grace from God. We don’t earn that gift by doing religious activities. We receive it as a gift through faith in Christ. It is a good thing to worship and to serve the poor, but that won’t save us. We do those things BECAUSE we have made right with God, not SO THAT God will accept us. That’s what the very next verse says: “*For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*” First we are saved by grace, *then* we do good. Not vice versa. Anytime someone says that to be accepted by God you have to believe AND do these other things, that’s fake good news.

### **More Fake Good News to get God’s acceptance:**

#### **3) “Be sincere”**

This says it doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you are sincere. This is based on the idea that all paths lead to God -- all religions are equal as long as you are sincere. This is also fake good news. The Judaizers were surely sincere in their beliefs. They traveled by foot all the way from Jerusalem to tell the Galatians they needed to adopt Judaism in order to be saved. They meant it. The 9/11 hijackers were sincere, too. But someone can be sincere and sincerely wrong, can’t they? We don’t invent truth by the sincerity of our belief. It is not our sincerity that makes something true. Listen to what Paul says in verse 8 and 9 <sup>8</sup>“*But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse!* <sup>9</sup>*As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse!*”

That’s intense. Paul is rejecting the Judaizer’s sincere belief. The reason Paul is so intense is because he realizes what is at stake when people accept a fake gospel. Counterfeit drugs are fake medicine. People who take them think they are taking a prescription their doctors ordered, but instead they end up with any number of hidden poisons such as road paint, antifreeze, or an undeclared and unapproved medication. For example, in February 2005, a 23-year-old man in Myanmar came down with malaria. Doctors prescribed him artesunate, an inexpensive anti-malaria drug. Typically, a patient recovers after a few days on the drug, but this young man grew much worse. He slipped into a coma, his

kidneys started failing. His doctors tried to save him, but they were too late. The infection spread to his brain and killed him.

It turns out that the artesunate given to the patient had only 20 percent of the active ingredient required to kill the parasites. It was a fake drug, and it killed him.<sup>6</sup> World police agency Interpol says more than one million people die each year from counterfeit drugs.<sup>7</sup> I wonder how many people die spiritually each year because of a fake gospel. Even one is a tragedy, and that's why Paul spoke so bluntly and passionately against it.

There is a word for the fake good news that our salvation depends on how well we obey religious and moral rules: it is called "Legalism." Legalism is wrong because it makes us think that laws are what save us, not Jesus and the Holy Spirit. If we fall for legalism, like the Galatians did, then we'll either think we're right with God when we're not, or we'll get frustrated and worn out by religious duties.

**The Real Good News:  
You can live forever, because Jesus died for you.**

Listen to what Paul to the believers in Ephesus: ***Ephesians 2:4-5*** *"because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* Jesus didn't come to make bad people good, Jesus came to make dead people live! You and I were dead -- "dead in transgressions". Our bodies weren't dead, but our spirits were dead. The part of us that relates to God had no life. That means that when our bodies died, we'd be completely dead forever. No amount of religion or good deeds will change that.

Six years ago I was on the treadmill at the gym and collapsed with a cardiac arrest. I had no pulse. Fortunately, a doctor who was there working out used an AED machine to shock my heart back to beating. I had surgery and I'm feeling great today. I was literally saved by grace. I was on the floor without pulse! I was helpless to save myself! I'm so glad that doctor didn't stand over me and give me self-improvement tips. I'm glad he didn't say, "Steve, you don't look so good - you should work out more often and get in better shape." I'm glad he didn't say, "Here is a diet plan - be sure to stick to it." No, he didn't tell me what I should do, he stepped in and saved me because I couldn't save myself, and now I'm alive.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Fake Drug Industry is Exploding...* <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/09/25/fake-drug-industry-exploding-and-we-cant-do-anything-about-it-373088.html>

<sup>7</sup> *Insight Crime* <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-briefs/counterfeit-drugs-kill-1-million-annually-interpol>

Each of us were dead spiritually. It doesn't help if someone says, "You should try to stop getting angry so often," or, "You should serve the homeless once a month." Those are great things to do if you are spiritually alive, but religious activities won't make us alive! If you take a corpse to church it is still dead. If you haul it on a mission trip, it's just going to stink. We are spiritually dead until Jesus makes alive again by *grace*. It is only his mercy that makes us alive! We don't hear the good news because we are good enough; all we do is receive it as a gift by putting our trust in Christ.

### **More Real Good News:**

**You can stop striving, because God's acceptance is a gift.**

*"because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved."* "It is by grace you have been saved." Grace is an undeserved favor -- it is a gift. You are saved as a gift because God loves you. You can stop wondering if you've done enough for God to approve of you. Jesus already did all that is necessary for you to be embraced by God forever! *Jesus didn't die to make you religious, He died to make you his child.* And that changes everything.

I want to tell you a story Mark Batterson tells in his book *Draw the Circle*. I ask you to pay attention to your inner response to it when you hear it. General Cecil Richardson is a retired chief of chaplains for the Air Force. One Saturday morning he was awakened at 5:30 AM with an unexplainable prompting to get new glasses. His wife had been telling him for weeks he needed new glasses but he had ignored her. The new prompting was a strange one at a strange time. The problem is that optical shops are not open early on weekends. So the general had a long breakfast at Denny's and then visited the nearest vision center just as it opened. When he got to the shop, Cecil felt led to tell the woman behind the counter that he was a Chaplain. He resisted at first because he didn't want her to think he wanted a military discount, but he felt she needed to know. So he obeyed the Holy Spirit and simply said, "I'm a chaplain." That's when this woman started trembling as tears filled her eyes. She said, "My husband is in the military and stationed overseas. And I just found out I have cancer. I have no idea what to do, so yesterday a friend prayed that God would send me a Chaplain. And here you are."

That's an amazing story, for both General Richardson and the woman, isn't it? How did you respond to that story? Some of us think of the General and think: "Wow, I'd like to be used by God like that!" You respond that way because you have believed the real Good News of grace. Others of us think, "That must have been amazing for him, but God would never use me like that. I've done some stuff and I'm not holy enough...." That's fake good news at work in your heart. Some of us have secretly disqualified ourselves for leadership or ministry. We think, "I couldn't do that after how I've been...." We don't tell anyone that - we just think it. That's based on fake good news.

Some of us think about how God answered that woman's need and think, "That's awesome for her... but God would never do that for me because I'm not really worthy of that..." That indicates we believe fake good news convincing us that we have to earn God's acceptance! When the real Good News sinks in to our souls, we'll be amazed by grace and we'll be set free to really live.

Good people don't go to heaven, alive people go to heaven. And Jesus can give you life. Not because you are good person, but because Jesus was a perfect person. Not because you have been religious, but because Jesus has died and rose again for us. We are born into this world spiritually dead, but we can all be made alive by Jesus. If you have never trusted Jesus as your savior, you can do that today.