

“Sidetracked”
By Chris Ulrich
Sunday, June 23rd, 2013

It's good to see everybody this morning. I like what you mentioned, Rebecca, “Taste and see that the Lord is good...” (Psalms 34:8) I know that's a verse; I don't remember off the top of my head where it's at. It's good to hear reports like that. I know that we gather together on Sunday morning, but it's not all just about a building, it's not all just about this time of the week—we really need to be seeking God at all times—and it's an on-going thing. We're looking at it like it has to be a long-term plan.

There is a group of people out there, not as much now as maybe ten years ago, and a lot of them are radio talk show hosts; their main goal was to incense the audience, or to make inflammatory statements. A lot of people referred to them as “Shock jocks.” Does everybody know what I'm talking about? It's the kind of thing where it was done to get attention or to drum up ratings. Sometimes they would make truthful statements that people didn't really want to hear. We've all heard them; we all know what they're about. I think Howard Stern was probably one of the most popular ones. I remember I was riding in a truck, probably twenty years ago—another guy from work had him on the radio. So I heard him, and, as a Christian, I was not like, “Oh, yeah, I'm definitely going to get XM radio and start listening to this guy.” When you're talking about public speaking, nobody likes being left looking like a fool; nobody likes being embarrassed. That could be in a large audience, or that could be in a small setting, whatever the case might be. When I was out in Colorado—this was a few months back—it was extremely hot—we're talking one hundred-ten, one hundred and fifteen degrees—we had just come through the Southwest—Needles California was like a hundred and twenty-two degrees, so it was like, kind of like last summer, only twenty degrees hotter, so just think about that on an ongoing basis. I was in this grocery store, and I just happened to talk to this gentleman in line, and he was actually from Minnesota, for all of you from Minnesota out there, and he had been living out there probably the better part of fifty years. We talked about the weather a little bit, and, what was interesting, he made a statement—and this gets back to my point—a strong, bold statement, “Yeah, the prairie's dying.” I got to thinking that the prairie covers a good swath of the central part of the United States, and, ecologically speaking, that's like the breadbasket of this country. That's where a lot of the food supply is from, and I'm not going to say that I was disputing him or second-guessing him, I'm just thinking, “That's unfortunate.” That's not to say, is it true or is it not true; it's more of this guy made a pretty strong statement. He's been out there a long time; he was actually a farmer, so I tend to think that this guy knows what he's talking about. It's not the kind of thing where “Nah, nah, nah, that's not true; that's not true.” That's wasn't really the point.

Anyway, to get back to what we've been preaching this month; this entire month, and actually the next couple of months, is dedicated to teaching from the book of Galatians. Tom Hanson, you started out us out this month, and one of the things you pointed out is that there are no shortcuts in God. That was one of the points and I really appreciate that, because there really isn't. We can't fake praying, we can't fake fasting... h Bible says, “From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.” (Luke 6:45) What's down there is eventually going to come up. We can't sugar-coat it; we can't pretend; we've got to come honest before God. Bob, you shared last week, and I appreciate you sharing about your up-bringing, and some of the experiences that you

had. You had prejudice in your family, and it was something that you were taught, but it was something that you realized, “This isn’t right! This isn’t the way it should be!” I like that you said, “The Gospel is for everybody.” One thing that I can say, before I start really getting into the message here is that, regardless of where we’re from, respect goes a long way. I was raised in the Northeast, and we didn’t eat a lot of greens up there, but, sister Reed, I remember your mom would bring greens over to the church. I remember first tasting them, and I thought, “This is really good.” I was actually down in Mississippi about a month ago, and we were in a buffet line, and I thought, “Yeah, I’ll have some greens.” There’s other stuff that I like; I like seafood, and Italian is probably my favorite.

What I want to say, getting back to the shock jocks, the effect that those people with those kinds of inflammatory remarks can make, it dawned on me how the Apostle Paul could have been thought of as a shock jock only because he definitely does not hold back when it comes to addressing the problems the church of Galatia was having.

Galatians 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you? This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

Nobody wants to be called a fool, so let’s just get that out of the way fast. It’s kind of like getting hit right in the face. It’s the kind of thing that gets everybody’s attention. Now someone might say, oh, he could have been nicer about it. Well, I’m not going to second guess the apostle whom; he was trying to get their attention. Think about what Job said to his own wife after she told him he should just curse God and die because of the suffering he was enduring. He told her that she spoke as a foolish woman. I look at that like it’s no different—he’s not calling them fools, he’s saying, “You’re acting foolish.” I’m not talking about anyone here—I’m not trying to backdoor anyone—that’s not my point at all. It is about the effect, and it is about, okay, you look at this day and age we live in. I honestly believe that the things that Christ said, the statements that He made, the power with which He came across, the anointing that He had, there’s people that would say, “Oh, He’s intolerant. He doesn’t welcome anybody.” There is such a thing as a standard that we have to uphold, and if God says this is the standard, then whom am I to say, “Oh, well, I still want to live this way, and I still want to act this way, and I still want to do this, but I still want to call myself a Christian,” then I’m just kidding myself. Think about things like this: our righteousness is as filthy rags (Isaiah 64:6). Or at his best state a man is altogether vanity (Psalms 39:5). Or let God be true but every man a liar (Romans 3:4). Those don’t sound very good. But then at the other end of the scale we hear God tell us come unto me all that are heavy laden and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). Or that I will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). Or that God said he would wipe away all tears from our eyes (Revelation 21:4) and give us eternal life (John 10:28).

I wanted to balance the scales because it’s not all about rebuke or chastisement either, but I do want to make a couple points before we move on in Galatians 3: How many here have ever gotten yelled for something? (I know everybody has, but it’s just a question) Think about especially our parents—you know, I’m not going to say everybody, but I know my folks (my parents recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary, which I think is an accomplishment) the way I was raised, me and my parents, we have a laugh about this, it’s like, me and my brother felt like they were the enemy, and, I think, in a lot of ways, they were like ,

“We can’t wait until you get out of the house,” and we were like, “We can’t wait, either.” Now it’s a much better, healthier relationship. We got yelled at. Think about the military. That’s where you really hear it the most. If you’ve heard the garbage can story—that’s not made up. I remember going to bootcamp thinking, “This isn’t really going to happen, is it?” This guy came in, and he’s got like a bat with a garbage can, Bam! Bam! Bam! Does everybody know what I’m talking about? The main point here is that it was for our own good. It’s to get us to work together cohesively. Our parents do it to get us to be better children, to be better adolescents, to be better adults, to be better adjusted... The main point here is that the church of Galatia had obviously turned aside from obeying the truth of the gospel and they needed a serious wake up call. They got sidetracked. Ed Kretzer, you talked a little bit this morning about being sidetracked with some of your schedules—it happens to all of us.

Hebrews 12:6-11 *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

It is a promise from God that it is for our own good, long term. So what is it specifically that the Galatians were doing that got Paul so angry? If we read down a little further in chapter 3 we see that many of them sought to continue teaching and living according to the law of the Old Testament and not uphold the promise and freedom that Jesus Christ brought us. What’s interesting is that because we are thousands of years removed from the Mosaic Law, not many of us in this room, or even people outside of this room are really trying to—I understand that there’s orthodox Jews in our society, but, by and large, it’s not like there’s a lot of people who are living by the law, as far as the sacrifices, the atonements, and just on and on and on. If you look at the Old Testament, especially Leviticus, where it goes into incredible detail... I mean, I look at that, and I think about, how many details were there to remember? It’s scary to think if you pour it this way, and if you get this amount of blood... It’s intricate, and I thank God to be able to live in this day and age, where we have this freedom in God, and God has poured out His Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:16), that we have the Holy Ghost within us that can lead us unto perfection.

Having said all that and knowing what this church was dealing with, how does that apply do us today in this day and age? I’m actually going to ask for some answers, if you could raise your hands. I’m not talking about being inundated by the battles of life, but I’d like to hear about—the Bible talks about Lot was vexed with the conversation of the wicked (2 Peter 2:7). We understand that we’re in a society—I was kind of thinking about this the other night—the way that the world will try to justify ungodliness or sinfulness is just reaching new levels. God gives us enough power to be able to shine greater and greater that we’re not overwhelmed by it or defeated by it. So, what are some battles that we fight in this day and age? “Anything goes.” That was actually in my notes, so... “God wants too much.” That’s an interesting one, that’s the mindset... “Is there really a God?” You know what? There was a period in my life when I was an atheist, but when God dealt with my life in such an unforgettable, undeniable, tangible way, I

never forgot that, and I don't ever want to. "Hypocrisy in the church." Yeah, there have been plenty of scandals over time. "The whole world is just full of senseless violence." Yeah, if you look at the description of the world in the days of Noah, in Genesis 6, it's like a carbon copy. "Conform to the world." "The Bible doesn't mean what it says." You've got a lot of misinterpretation; the Bible says all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God (2 Timothy 3:16). "If God's really love, then why do we have earthquakes and famines..." That's a good one; we have disasters and catastrophes and thousands of people dying. "A lot of people think God is their enemy, when they're just contrary—God loves us and He's our friend and wants what's best for us. A lot of people think that He's our enemy and He just wants to beat us down all the time." Yeah, that could be interpreted that way. "Christians that don't have a heart to work with their community or reach out to people." Yeah, that's in my notes, too, so hold on minute... "The rat race; having your attention pulled away from God." "False doctrine." "Sports, or just entertainment." Oh, it's NFL Sunday! You know what? There's got to be a balance; that's good. That's good.

There are a lot of forces working against what we're trying to do, what God wants us to live like, and just having a daily walk with God. That's what it's all about. This isn't a matter of just once a week, or one certain time, or just a quick experience. If we look at the parable of the sower, and all those that died off, it says that they had no depth within themselves to be able to sustain themselves (Mark 4:5 and Mark 4:16-17), or they were taken by the cares of this world (Mark 4:19), and getting back to having a plan, our plan has to be living for God for our lives! The thing is, the world gets in the way by trying to show us all these other options, or trying to get us to think, "Oh, you can do it, and still be okay," but that's not the truth. That's not even close to the truth.

Galatians 3:21-26 *Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.*

So, Paul is really going into detail about how a certain segment of them wanted to live by the law. Now I want to ask you this, and I'm going to look for some answers again, "What are some ways that we get the victory?" I'm going to ask for a show of hands, again, what are some ways that we are able to conquer—like, Andy, what you shared at the beginning, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31) or, there's nothing that can separate us from the love of God (Romans 8:38-39)... What are some things? I'd like to hear some answers. "Having faith in what the Word of God says, the promises that are there." "Prayer." Prayer, definitely. "Being happy in the here and now, not always wanting more." "Having your mind made up." Yeah. "Good fellowship." Amen, we had that yesterday. "Diligently seeking Him." "Putting away evil for the sanctity of God, and approaching God more." "Having goals in God." Yeah. "Humbling ourselves." "Having the courage to look to the end." Those are all things that we just keep building up our repertoire, we could call it, in our walk with God. Just because we aren't fighting the same battles—I made that connection, or maybe I should say, disconnection, that nobody here is really trying to keep the law of the Old Testament—we can still learn from

that church. We can still learn from the fact that they did get sidetracked, that they did have a turning aside... Looking at it from this standpoint, all the things that could separate us, there's that many that can keep us, as well.

We've seen an outpouring of the Holy Ghost lately, and one of the ways is that we've seen a lot of people get baptized. We had a long period of time, I'd say ten months, where we didn't see anybody—I'm talking about this body of believers. I haven't looked at the actual numbers, but I know Bianca and Nancy, your mom got baptized, and Ken and Mike and Mark, you guys got baptized, and there's others in here as well. Justin, you got baptized a couple of months ago. Those things are victories! I'm looking at it like, when you go through a dry spell, and then God pours out His Spirit, and we have preparation for it, and we receive it.

Galatians 3:27 For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

So it takes that. You look at where in the Bible it says, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not..." (Mark 16:16) You can't get around that, but I don't want to get around it. I'm not trying to complicate it, and I don't think anybody here is either. Paul, in another book, in Corinthians, said don't be deceived, or don't be removed from the simplicity that is the Gospel of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:3). It is a simple message, but God is complex. You look at the most technologically advanced cars, or space rockets, or computer technology—and I'll be honest with you, when I look at some of that stuff, I just see the incredible wisdom and understanding of God, and the intricacies in that. I mean, you look at a computer board, and it's like, "How can you...?" I got a new computer at work recently (I had dropped my other one at a job in Milwaukee), and, I tell you what, it really makes you realize how much you rely on other people as far as technology goes. There's this one guy that lives in Indiana and he's pretty incredible as far as that technology goes; he's an IT guy, but it took him like a good six hours. My point is that you can see God—we'll know Him by the things that are made (Romans 1:20). That's really the ultimate point; you look around at some of the beauty of the world, look at the creation of God, and, even beyond the stars, it's God.

My goal today is not for me to get your attention; it's for God to get your attention. And sometimes we have to address the unpleasant aspects of life, but we can't get so offended by the rebuke and correction of God, in whatever form it may come. We can shut off the TV, the internet, Facebook, (I'm not against Facebook, it's like any other technology, or sports—shut off the game for a while today) and we still have to interact with people. It's not like all of the sudden we're hermits on some island that we're not going to have any kind of interaction. We should; God wants us to have a testimony.

Now on the same trip (and I'm closing in a couple of moments) we had actually gone all the way out to California. How many has ever been out there in Los Angeles County and been stuck in traffic? This was about one o'clock in the afternoon, coming across from L.A. to San Bernardino, we were not even on a main highway, but it was six lanes. All of the sudden, we get hung up in traffic, and we're going like twelve miles an hour for like two hours, and it's like, Jesse, I was channeling my father. It's like looking around and seeing cars and trucks and motorcycles and boats and on and on and on. I've seen Chicago, Miami, and New York, but nothing like Los Angeles. But it got me thinking about how many people there are not just there but everywhere. Of course, I wasn't too happy about the traffic but God dealt with me about how I need to be looking at all the people as opportunities rather than obstacles. And I'm not talking about an opportunity to sell them something or even just preach at them. It'll come out—

after a while, people are going to know. We pray for those open doors, and we've got to look for those open doors, as far as a random act of kindness. Befriend a stranger. Don't get so riled up over the silliest problems. Be the city set on hill that Jesus has commanded us to be.

I want to thank you all for your time; I appreciate your attention and your responses, too.

