Hi,

The Blue Angels flying over the city today. That makes for a good day in my book! I hope you can see them.

Here are today’s updates:

* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://www.scottengle.org/). All of this week’s videos and podcasts have been posted.
* Keep sending in those movie and book recommendations.

Tough times can shake our beliefs, thrust us out of our comfort zones. But our proclamation of the gospel and the beliefs that undergird the proclamation is Good News for a hurting world. It matters!!

***Galatians 1:1-10 (NRSV)***

**Paul an apostle—sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the members of God’s family who are with me,**

**To the churches of Galatia:**

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to set us free 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 the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed! As we have said before, so now I repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed!**

**Am I now seeking human approval, or God’s approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ.**

Galatia was an area in ancient Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) visited by Paul on his first missionary journey in the late 40’s AD. Paul’s success in Galatia was largely among the pagans, not the Jews (4:8-9). Many Galatian pagans believed the Gospel and were baptized into the body of Christ. After Paul’s departure, the Christian communities in Galatia were “running a good race” (5:7) until some people came to the communities teaching and preaching a gospel that differed from that taught by Paul. This set the stage for a confrontation. So far as Paul was concerned, there simply was no other Gospel than the one that he had brought to the Galatians. The question for us is this: what is the problem and how could it matter so much?

*The “circumcizers”*

Most New Testament scholars agree that the problems in Galatia were created by Jewish-Christians who taught that keeping the Jewish Law (circumcision, food laws, Sabbath, and the rest) was necessary to become a full-fledged disciple of Jesus. In other words, to become a true Christian, one first needed to become a Jew. This may seem an odd claim to make, but we need to remember that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. All the apostles were Jewish. Jesus said he had come to fulfill the Law, not abolish it (Matthew 5:17-20). It isn’t hard to imagine that these “circumcizers” could weave together a persuasive case that Jesus-followers in Galatia should keep the Law.

To say that Paul was angry is an understatement. The letter-writing protocol of the day called for every letter to open with a somewhat lengthy introduction expressing praise and thanksgiving for the letter’s recipient. All of Paul’s letters begin in this way – with the exception of his letter to the Galatians. All niceties are set aside. Paul wastes no time getting to the point: “I can’t believe your fickleness – how easily you’ve turned traitor . . . it is not a minor variation, you know, it is completely other, an alien message, a no-message, a lie about God” (from Peterson’s *The Message*).

*“ . . . who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age . . . ”*

Paul could cram a lot into a few words. In these phrases from 1:4, Paul sums up all that the “circumcizers” are undermining. For Paul, Jesus’ faithfulness all the way to the cross, his willing gift of himself, is what has put us right with God – that and nothing else. The cross is the means by which we are liberated from the present age of sin and death so that we might enter into the age of the Spirit. And all of this is the plan of God.

For Paul, to return to the Law was to return to slavery, to forsake the redemption offered by Jesus’ atoning death. The Law had fulfilled its purpose of leading everyone toward the Messiah. The time for the Law, as the thought-to-be means of salvation, had passed. Paul writes that he “died to the Law so that I might live for God” (2:19, TNIV). Paul had passed from the old to the new, from death to life, and there could be no going back. Not for him, not for any of the Christians.

*Why it matters*

The Gospel of Jesus Christ, this Good News that Paul brought to Galatia and we are to bring to the world, is a proclamation, an announcement. The Gospel is not a dry recitation of doctrine interesting only to theologians. It is a trumpet that calls people to the God-Who-Is.

The Gospel proclaims truth. The Gospel claims that some things are true and some are not. The Gospel proclaims that there is one God who created everything only to see it damaged and twisted by human rebellion. The Gospel proclaims that through the faithfulness of God’s one and only Son, even to the cross, humanity and all of creation has been put right with God. The work is not done, but the victory has been won. And how do we know this? Because the Gospel proclaims not only Christ crucified . . . but Christ risen.

Some of the Galatians had been torn away from the Gospel of Christ by false teachers, the wolves about which Paul would later warn the elders in Ephesus (Acts 20:29). It cannot surprise us that the dangers of false teaching is a theme in all of the later New Testament writings. We stake our lives on the truthfulness of the Gospel. Of course it matters.

*A bit more -- heresy?*

There’s a word that will stop you in your tracks. As Ellsworth Kalas put it, “A preacher either has to be daring or foolhardy to use a word like *heresy* in our day.” A great many horrors have been visited upon people in the name of *heresy*. Yet, it is the accusation that Paul levels at those who have come to Galatia teaching another gospel (as if there is one!). Kalas also recalls a quote from Andre Suares, “In a dead religion there are no more heresies.”

In the Christian context, defining “heresy” is straightforward – it is an opinion, doctrine, or practice that is contrary to the essentials that have been generally accepted by the Christian community. A heresy has the potential to be fatal to the faith. They may be what it is, but knowing one when you see one is another matter.

Paul believed that the teachings of the “circumcizers” in Galatia lay outside the bounds of the Gospel of Christ. When we rise to say the Apostles Creed, we are putting concrete shape to the message that we proclaim to the world. We are stating essentials. When we say, as Christians have for two millennia, that we believe in the “resurrection of the body,” we are necessarily saying that the denial of bodily resurrection is a heresy. The purpose of the creed is to help put some boundaries around the “essentials.” You’ll notice that the creed says nothing about infant baptism, tongues-speaking, or women in the pulpit. Those are “intramural” disagreements, not disputes about the essentials.

Wise Christians know that the list of unifying essentials is brief. As John Wesley put it, “In the essentials, unity; in all else, liberty; and in all things, charity.” To deny Jesus’ divinity or his humanity or his Lordship over all creation is to deny the heart of the Gospel – and we sometimes label such denials as heresies. It is a helpful word, but one that we will rarely use or hear.

*Movie recommendation*

I haven’t recommended many westerns, so here is one of the best: *Lonesome Dove*, starring Robert Duvall and Tommy Lee Jones. It is a four-part mini-series made in 1988, recommended to us by Mike and Patti Cook. It is free on Starz and available for purchase on Amazon Video for $9.99.

*Book recommendation*

Mike and Patti Cook also recommended the novel, *Lonesome Dove*, by Larry McMurtry. I loved this novel when I read it, couldn’t put it down.

I guess it is just a Lonesome Dove (and Blue Angels) day!

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott