

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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A Study of Galatians: The Authentic Gospel, the Gospel of Christ: Galatians 1:1-24

Today we begin a new series of talks on the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians. The talks will look at each chapter in turn and we trust that the instruction found in these six chapters will be a real blessing to all who listen. Our title for Galatians 1 is "The authentic Gospel, the Gospel of Christ."

The mention of the Epistle to the Galatians may immediately bring certain verses to our minds. Perhaps like me from Sunday school days you remember Galatians 5:22-23, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace" etc. Or maybe Galatians 2:20 where the Apostle Paul says, "the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me". These are wonderful positive verses, but there are some negative ones too. I think of Galatians 5:7, where Paul says "ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye obey not the truth"; and from Galatians 3:1, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you?" From these two verses we can see that very early in the history of the church (perhaps as early as AD 60) something had gone badly wrong amongst these believers. These are pretty strong words which the Apostle uses - fools or senseless, bewitched or under a spell. Whatever had gone wrong? We don't have to read too far in Galatians 1 before we find the problem. They had become victims to false teachers who had preached 'another gospel', which really wasn't 'good news' at all but had stumbled them (Galatians 1:6).

As this is a corrective epistle, Paul emphasises his apostleship very forcibly in Galatians 1:1. His apostleship was not by man's appointment or choosing, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father. This is a vital point to note. The Apostle was speaking from God - not man. As well as underlining his apostleship, he also includes 'all the brethren which were with him' in the greeting, as it were to give added weight to what he was about to write.

The speed at which he moves through these opening verses is an indication of the serious nature of the problem. There was a battle to be fought and, just like the shepherd boy David running to meet the giant (1 Samuel 17:1-58), Paul is in a hurry to get to grips with the evil doctrine which was working in them. Both in Galatians 5:9 and in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8, Paul uses the figure of leaven - leavening the whole lump. The picture is one of making bread and once leaven, or yeast, was introduced into the dough it permeated the whole mixture. Leaven always typifies evil. In Corinth the evil was of a moral nature. They were allowing things to happen in the Christian company which were morally wrong and dishonouring to God. Here the evil was of a doctrinal nature. They had embraced bad doctrine and that, if unchecked, would permeate through the whole company - leading to spiritual ruin. What a warning for us to be on our guard today as there are those who teach (often misquoting Scripture) things which are both morally and doctrinally opposed to the word of God.

The Apostle Paul knew the believers he was writing to. He had preached the Gospel of Christ to them when he had been with them. He loved them; they were his brothers and sisters in Christ, and it pained him that they were being seduced by false preachers with a false message. He writes to the 'Churches of Galatia'. I understand that 'Galatia' translated means 'the country of the Gauls' and probably the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe were all in that province. The time the Apostle spent with them is recorded in Acts 13-14 and from these chapters we are left in no doubt what message Paul preached. In Acts 13:38-39 he says, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins. And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses". Clear, concise and unequivocal words. They believed it then, why not now? Why had the Gospel of Christ become lacking in any way to them?

You can hear the Apostle's frustration and pain as he reminds them that the Lord Jesus Christ was the One who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of God our Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. (Galatians 1:4)

We will read Galatians 1:6-9 as they give the very reason why the Apostle had taken up his pen to write to these believers who were in very real spiritual danger. "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed".

In another translation (Amplified Bible) Galatians 1:6 reads: "I am surprised and astonished that you are so quickly turning renegade and deserting Him who invited and called you by the grace of Christ, the Messiah and that you are transferring your allegiance to a different, even an opposition gospel".

Galatians 1:9 (Amplified Bible) reads: "As we said before, so I now say again, If anyone is preaching to you a Gospel different from or contrary to that which you received from us, let him be accursed - anathema, devoted to destruction, doomed to eternal punishment!"

These are very strong words indeed. "Removed from Him", "deserting Him", "an opposition Gospel", "a perversion of the Gospel of Christ", "to be accursed - anathema"!

What had these Galatians done which had upset the Apostle so much? Had they given up Christ and the gospel of grace which Paul had preached? Well no - not exactly. What they had done was to mix up the grace of God with the keeping of the Law. Evidently Jewish teachers had come to them teaching that as well as having Christ, they needed to keep the Law. This will be explained in more detail in the following talks in the series. This mixed message was leading them away from Christ and from the principle of salvation by grace alone. Now before we get too critical of these believers, let us look around at the Christian Church today and into our own hearts. Is there not an appeal to the mind of a religious person to the notion that we can do something in order to merit God's favour? How many there are today who say they believe the Bible, they believe in God, they may even say that they believe in the atoning death of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the Cross, and yet still try to gain salvation through their own efforts?

Under the terms of the Law, God's dictate was "this do and you shall live". However hard men tried, they found it impossible to keep the law. They had to learn the futility of trying to keep the Law as a way to gain eternal life. To sum it up, Paul says in Romans 3:20, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin". Here then is the reason why the Law was given. To make man realise his sinful condition, and his inability to do anything to help himself. He must rely wholly on the mercy and goodness of God.

The Law has been described as a plumb-line. A builder may hold a plumb-line against a crooked wall and see exactly where it is crooked, but the plumb-line can't make the wall straight! This is the objective of the Law - it tells us we're wrong but can't make us right! Later in the Epistle, we will read that the Law was our school master to bring us to Christ (Galatians 3:24).

Now that we have been brought to Christ we no longer need the Law. To some Christians this will sound strange but it is what the Bible teaches! Perhaps there are some of you listening today, who believe keeping the Law is required for your salvation. The reality is that although there is in the heart of man a desire to do something in order to gain God's favour, our efforts are all in vain!

Take Cain and Abel as an example (Genesis 4:1-15). Abel grasped the right way to approach a holy God, and offered a lamb, (which of course to God prefigured the death of His Son) and God accepted his offering. Cain laboured hard and by the sweat of his brow brought an offering of the "fruit of the ground" before God. God had no respect for his offering. Trying to do something will only hinder us in our approach to God. The old hymn says:

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling.*

We need to realise that any suggestion of our being able to do anything is offensive to God. If there was the slightest chance that we could merit salvation by our own efforts, do you think God would have sent His only begotten Son to die such a terrible death on a Roman cross? The fact that the Lord Jesus Christ came to this world and died on the cross of Calvary is evidence that man was incapable of anything which could bring him to God.

Although these Galatian believers had not given up Christ altogether, they had been persuaded to believe that as well as having Christ they had to keep the Law. As I have already said, there is a part of us that willingly responds to that kind of message - which is not a gospel, and must always be rejected. Let us refuse any who preach that we need to add to the work of Christ for our salvation. "Let him be accursed," says the Apostle. (Galatians 1:8-9)

Now if we look at Galatians 1:10-24, we see that the Apostle is at pains to prove that the Gospel he preached was by revelation of Jesus Christ and not by consultation of men. He reminds them of his background in Jewish traditions which he details in Philippians 3:5-6. If anyone had reason to hang on to the rites and rituals of Judaism you would think it was Saul of Tarsus. But his meeting with the Lord Jesus on the Damascus road (Acts 9:1-9) had changed him forever! What a transformation from persecutor to preacher; from blasphemer to blessing. Not only did he obtain mercy as we read in 1 Timothy 1:11, but the "glorious gospel of the blessed God" was entrusted to him. In that

chapter he declares "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," and adds "of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). The Apostle Paul was a 500 pence debtor (see Luke 7:36-50) and he knew it! Here he calls himself the chief of sinners. In Ephesians 3:8 he says that he was "less than the least of all saints", and in 1 Corinthians 15:9 calls himself the "least of the apostles". The great Apostle never forgot the rock from whence he was hewn, nor the pit from whence he was digged (Isaiah 51:1).

I looked up the word 'authentic', in the dictionary and this is what it said - genuine, authoritative, true, entitled to acceptance, of established credibility, trustworthy and setting forth real facts. It also carries the thought of being proven. The opposite would be false, questionable, fake, unreliable and worthless. Counterfeiting is one of the devil's plays. We need to be alert and on our guard to be able to discern what is truth and what is error, testing what we hear against the Scriptures of Truth (see Acts 17:11).

The Gospel which Paul preached to these Galatian saints was the real thing, genuine, true and of real value - anything else was worthless. Paul's preaching was not tailored to suit either the company or the occasion. He preached the same Gospel to kings and nobles as well as to prisoners and slaves. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34) and the Gospel of His grace is to whosoever will. In 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 we have a very clear record of what Gospel the Apostle preached. Let me read these verses to you. "Moreover, brethren I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures".

This is the authentic Gospel; this is the Gospel of Christ. From these verses, I want to bring three points to your notice which form part of the 'authentic' Gospel. The first point is "our sins". The second is that "Christ died for our sins". Now I should immediately qualify that by saying that in these verses Paul is addressing believers. "The righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe". These words are taken from Romans 3:22 and clearly show us that while salvation is available to all it is only "upon them who believe". Now that is the third point - "believing". I want to briefly look at these three points as I believe a grasp of these truths will give us an understanding of the authentic Gospel.

Our sins

If we want to understand what sin is and the effect of our sins we will have to take instruction from the Scriptures of Truth. I say this because man's thoughts in relation to these things have moved in opposition to God's thoughts, and perhaps especially in the last 50 years or so in our country. In fact, many people will tell you that they don't believe in God and as a consequence they reject the concept of both sin and sins. So we have a situation today where many people don't believe in God and don't believe in the concept of sin. Sadly even some church groups seem very reluctant to teach what the Bible says in relation to sins. The book of Judges closes with the sorry words which tell us that, as a result of there being no king in Israel, every man did that which was right in his own eyes (Judges 21:25) I believe that in our country (which was once called "the land of the Bible") we are at this point in our spiritual history. It would seem the majority have little or no thought of God or His Son, Jesus Christ and do whatever they like to please themselves.

Just look at the moral decline in our nation in the last 50 years. Things which are now common place in society and promoted would have been frowned upon half a century ago. This is as a result of men and women giving up God and following their own desires. The Bible teaches that we are sinners - by birth and by practice. Just as a dog barks because it is in its nature to do so, we commit sin because of our fallen nature. Man was not created like this but the Bible tells us that "by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners" Romans 5:19. We inherit our sinful nature from our parents and this can be traced back to the Garden of Eden when our first parents fell by disobeying God (Genesis 3:1-7). If you want to test what I am saying, just think of a child - any child, do they need to be taught to be naughty? Of course not! The Bible says, "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" Romans 3:23.

Now this kind of message is very unpopular today - it's old fashioned, out dated, restrictive - but it is God's Word. Unless men and women realise that they are sinners in the eyes of God and need forgiveness they will not turn to God in repentance which is the first requirement for salvation.

Christ died for our sins

We need to understand the work which Jesus Christ did when He died on the cross of Calvary. On the cross He gave a very full answer to the question of sin, the sin of the world. He was uniquely able to do this because of His sinless perfection. Born of a virgin, the Lord Jesus Christ did not have the sinful nature we all have; neither did He sin during His life on earth.

The New Testament writers give a wonderful witness to the perfection of Christ.

- Paul, the intellect, says “He knew no sin” (2 Corinthians 5:21);
- Peter, the action man, says “He did no sin” (1 Peter 2:22); and
- John, the beloved says “in Him was no sin” (1 John 3:5).

It is marvellous how the Scriptures blend to bring out the worth of the Son of God, the only One capable to be the sin bearer and our substitute! As a result of His death and resurrection, the Lord Jesus Christ has set a basis on which a holy and righteous God can forgive sinners. You and I, we can be completely forgiven of the punishment of our sins if we believe that Jesus Christ died in our place. He was our substitute, as the Bible puts it, “the just one for us the unjust ones”, 1 Peter 3:18. I’m sure we all understand the idea of a substitute. In football or rugby, one player leaves the pitch and is replaced by another who takes their place. So this second point of the Gospel of Christ is that we can only have God’s salvation if we personally accept that Jesus Christ bore the judgement of God against our sins on the cross. He took our place, bore our judgement, and is our Substitute.

As the Easter hymn puts it, “He died that we might be forgiven.”

Believing

And finally there has to be faith. Not law or works or rites or rituals but faith. The Bible clearly says, “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast”. Ephesians 2:8. Faith is trust and believing, taking God at His word. I’m sure that much more will be said about faith as this series of talks is given but we have to realise that faith, or trust in what God has done through the Person of Jesus Christ - and nothing else, is the only way to be saved and to enjoy a blessed relationship with Him. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved”. Acts 16:31

May God bless you all.

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