

Galatians week 3 – What is the gospel?

Good morning everyone we are going to continue with our study of Galatians chapter 1 and we are moving into a very interesting section; let me read from verse 6.

"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— ⁷ which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.

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! ⁹ 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!"

Let's look at this section verse by verse – verse 6 says; *"I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you"*

If you remember I said in our introduction to Galatians that Paul, on his first missionary journey, sometime earlier, was the one who had brought this gospel message to them and it is reasonable to think he was in regular communication with the Galatians church after that.

Yet it didn't take them long before, as Paul puts it, they were 'deserting' his teaching and the message he had brought to them.

The word used here '*deserting*' is a strong one and it means to **turn, or run away from one thing to another**. The errors of the Galatian church serves as a warning to us of how '*fickle*' we all are and how easily we are led astray.

Matt 12:24 says, "For *false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders **to deceive, if possible, even the elect***".

In this instance the false teachers **had got in on the inside** because we read in Chapter 2:4 "This *matter arose because **some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves***"

Can I say to begin with '**the enemy within**' is the most dangerous enemy of all! It is a sad fact that so often the source of our battles, disagreements and conflicts are from within the church.

We may reasonably expect those outside the church would give us the most trouble as they don't share our values and beliefs, but this is not the case. An enemy planted from within is the most insidious, **especially in this area of false teaching** because it is often a 'drip by drip' approach, slowly undermining the true gospel.

Surmise with me for a minute! Its true is it not? That If you wanted to poison someone and get away with it. You would perhaps, for example, put a bit of arsenic on a lovely piece of meat and do it slowly, over a period of time, not straight away.

It's the mixing of the good with the bad which is most devilish and it was exactly this which was happening in this instance at Galatia. They said you could keep your faith in the Lord Jesus but you also needed 'works' - Jewish customs, circumcision and the like.

Can I counsel you, if you come across teaching that doesn't line up with the Bible, with the word of God, don't sit under it and let it subtly wear you down – get away from it quickly before you're led astray.

That's the first thing I want to say, be aware of the enemy within, but let's read the verse again.

*"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—⁷ which is really no gospel at all**".*

'Turning to a different gospel' so would you agree that firstly we need know what the true gospel is, this gospel Paul was preaching and then set that as the standard? Having done that we can then compare these different 'gospels' to that standard and see if they line up.

We hear a lot about this word '**gospel**' – even in our society you hear people use the term "I am telling you the gospel truth" as if the gospel is the highest standard of truth (and to us it is)

Firstly let's look at the word *gospel*. It comes from a Greek word which means literally, **good news or glad tidings**. This word for *gospel* has historic meaning also.

In ancient days when soldiers went out to battle, people waited anxiously for a report from the battlefield about the outcome. Once the outcome was known, marathon runners or messengers dashed back to give the report. That is why Isaiah wrote, "How *beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news*" (Isa. 52:7).

The lookouts in the watchtower were trained to know the signs. If the messenger was running half heartily, and ill at ease, it would suggest **bad news** however if there was a sprint in his step it was **good news**. This in essence is the meaning of the word gospel – **it is a good news message for everyone**.

So we have to keep this in mind when we think about what the gospel message is, most **fundamentally it is good news**, but what is the content of this 'good news gospel'?

Well there is a clue in verse 6 when it says '*you were called you to live in the grace of Christ* **'the grace of Christ' the gospel is essentially a message of grace;** remember what we said about this grace last week. We said it was, 'The unmerited love and favour of God toward human beings'

It is God's unmerited favour. It is kindness from God that we don't deserve. There is nothing we have done for it, nor is there anything we can do to earn this favour. It is a gift from God.

This is the first and most important part of this true gospel. **This is the good news**, it is a gift and anything, I repeat anything that says you have to earn it yourself, do something for it, **it then becomes bad news**, because all our works are 'like filthy rags'. This 'gospel of works' is the most common false gospel around and it comes in many guises.

Some will say you have to go to church – keep the sacraments if you are to enter into heaven.

Some will say you have to be baptised before you can be saved.

Some will say you have to attend every meeting, keep all our rules, if you are to enter into the kingdom of God – The list is endless!

The truth is: None of these 'add on's' will save you - put you right with God – get you into heaven – give you eternal life. It's a false gospel.

That's the first thing I would say about these teachers who would propagate 'another gospel' as Mathew Henry puts it "they try to overturn the foundation of the covenant of grace, by setting up the works of the law in the place of Christ's righteousness"

But what are the other elements of the true gospel? Now there are **many minor things** we could disagree on as Christian's, **but not divide on**, for example; women in leadership, how we baptise people, interpretation of end times prophecy etc. But these are not the fundamentals of our faith; these are not what the gospel foundations are built upon.

But there are certain RED LINES that make the gospel what it is – and we must not cross them.

The first one I would say is: **the authority of the scriptures** – as I said last week, the message and words of our Bibles '*are God breathed*' (2 Timothy 3:16) They are the final authority on all matters. If we can't agree that the scriptures are absolutely true, without error **we have no common ground, we have no foundation.**

How can you believe and understand what the true gospel is if you question and doubt everything that is said in our Bibles?

That's the first thing we have to say - the true gospel message is revealed in the scriptures and we submit to it and believe it literally.

Now this is in complete contrast to this 'other gospel' Paul warns about, those false prophets, teachers, never really submit to the authority of scriptures but rather they **add to them** or **take away** from them or **dilute** them, or **undermine** them or even they totally **reject them.**

Secondly this *real gospel* tells us we need to be '**born again**'.

Jesus said to Nicodemus '*you must be born again*' (John 3) He went onto say if you're not born again *you won't see Gods Kingdom*, it doesn't matter how many 'good things' you do and say, unless this *rebirth* has taken place you will not see Gods kingdom.

When I say 'born again' I mean born of the Spirit. We are body, soul and spirit beings and because of original sin **we spiritually died** we cannot have a relationship with God.

But when a Christian comes to faith and commits their life to follow Jesus **his spirit is reborn. He becomes born again.**

Thirdly this true gospel calls us out for what we are – **sinner saved by grace.**

All of us have '*fallen short*' not one that does good scriptures says – '*all have gone astray*' (Rom 3:23) and because of that Jesus has died for our sins. It is the purpose He came to shed His blood on the cross for us – The atonement.

Jesus said to the self righteous Pharisees "*It's not the healthy that need a doctor but the sick*" (Luke 5:31) any 'gospel' that does not recognise this starting point, that we are sinners in need of a redeemer, but would rather instead, tell you, you are ok, you don't need to come to God to confess your sins, in essence, really just confirms and encourages you in your wrong and sinful lifestyle is a false gospel.

Fourthly this true gospel preached by Paul tells us: **Jesus is the only way to God** this is another red line we dare not cross! Listen to these verses;-

John 14:6 Jesus said to him, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*".

Acts 4:12 "*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*"

We don't need to go into this in great detail. it is obvious from these scriptures "*there is only one mediator between God and man Jesus Christ*" (1 Timothy 2:5))

In contrast to that, another 'gospel' taught today is; 'there are many paths to God'. All I can say is if you don't know Jesus as your Lord and Saviour and He knows you - you're in trouble!

Fifthly this true gospel tells us of **Jesus Physical resurrection.**

As we said last week unless Jesus rose from the dead, we have no faith at all! "*we should be pitied amongst all men*" (1 Corinthians 15) **but he has risen!** It may surprise you to know there are many modern day theologians, 'Christians' even that don't believe in this **physical resurrection.**

There are others like the Jehovah witnesses that believe Jesus resurrection was a spiritual one rather than a physical one. There is so much scripture that contradicts this error. Like when Jesus revealed himself to His disciples, showed them the scars from His hands and His side.

The truth of the gospel is; Jesus rose from the dead in the very same physical body in which He died. This resurrected, physical body was a glorified, spiritual body. The spiritual body is not merely "spirit." The spiritual body is the resurrected, glorified, physical body.

This I say are the **red lines** that we cannot cross if we are to hold onto the truth of the gospel. But just to finish of lets read this final passage again.

*"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!**"⁹ 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!**"*

Regarding angels from heaven the Mormon Church says this; "Angels are sent from the heavenly realm to "**deliver God's messages**, to minister to His children, **to teach them the doctrines of salvation**, to call them to repentance, to give them the priesthood and its keys"

It's interesting to note the 'Angel moroni' visited the Mormon founder Joseph Smith and supposedly revealed to him these 'new truths'.

I will let the scriptures speak again; *"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!**"*

Regarding this word **curse** used here by Paul, it wasn't enough for him to say, "Don't listen to these people" Paul sombrelly thought that they should be cursed. It is really impossible for Paul to express this idea with any more strength than he did in this sentence.

This is a deadly serious matter in fact it is so serious, he says it twice with absolute clarity! It was that important to him to preserve the true gospel.

It makes me think as a 'teacher' who stands up here, the awesome responsibility of getting it right.

But also to each one of us, to ensure we test everything we hear to the scriptures. To stand firmly on the foundations of our faith handed down to us by Jesus and the Apostles and then live out this true gospel of good news in our lives.

Amen