

GALATIANS

THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel is Unique - Galatians 1:1-10

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)

Warm-Up

1. Have you ever been given conflicting advice about something important? How did you decide who to trust?

Read Galatians 1:1-5

2. How does Paul describe himself in verses 1–2? Why does he emphasise that he is an apostle "not from men nor through man"?
3. Why is it important that Paul's authority comes directly from Jesus Christ? What does that mean for how we read his letters today?
4. List everything these verses tell us about Jesus and what he has done for us.
5. According to verses 3–5, what are the results of Jesus giving himself for our sins?
6. Paul greets the Galatians with "grace and peace." What is the source of our grace and peace? How have you known this to be true in your life?

Read Galatians 1:6-10

7. What surprises Paul about the Galatian Christians? Why is he so astonished?
8. What is the "different gospel" the Galatians were turning to? Why does Paul insist it is "really no gospel at all"?
9. What are some modern ways people add to or subtract from the gospel today?
10. Paul says that even if an angel preached another gospel, it should be rejected and the messenger should be accursed. What does this teach us about the final authority of the gospel message?
11. Why do you think Paul repeats his warning in verses 8–9? Why is Paul using such intense language?
12. Verse 10 asks whether Paul is trying to please people or God. Why can faithfulness to the gospel sometimes make us unpopular?
13. Are there times when you subtly believe God accepts you because of your performance rather than because of Christ? What might that look like?
14. What practical habits help us stay grounded in the true gospel instead of drifting toward legalism or false teaching?
15. After studying this passage, what is one truth about the gospel that you want to remember this week? How will it shape the way you live?

PRAY: *Loving Lord, we thank you that you have given us salvation through faith in your son who died and rose again for us. Please guard us from believing distorted gospels, keep us from legalism, and grow our confidence in Jesus' finished work on the cross for us. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

TITLE: The Gospel is Unique

PASSAGE: Galatians 1:1-10

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: The only Gospel is that of Jesus Christ died and Risen

STRUCTURE:

- 1-2 - The Apostle of God
- 3-5 - The Gospel of God
- 6-10 - The Uniqueness of the Gospel

- There are two types of people in the world
- Those who send text messages in big long, edited, paragraphs with multiple different points and ideas. Maybe they even craft them in a separate app to get the grammar all correct and make sure the logic flows - AND Then
- There are those who send smaller, more to the point messages - there's urgency. There are things at stake that need to be addressed quickly. Not a lot of time for nuance - just get straight to the point.
- In our marriage - Rachel is the former, and I am definitely the latter, although I think 4 years in we have both compromised slightly....
- But the book of Galatians is like the second type of people. As we read through the letter, we get the feeling of urgency, the need to get stuff on paper. Paul isn't pulling any punches here and he's not mincing his words.
- If the book of Romans is the really well crafted essay, Galatians is like its younger scrappier brother.
- But the message of Galatians is crystal clear - Don't be tempted to add anything onto the Gospel but rejoice and relish in the freedom that the Gospel brings.

- Paul is writing this letter to a group of home churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia in what is modern day Turkey.
- These churches were planted by Paul and we can read about that in Acts 13-14 and they were predominantly from a non-Jewish background. The church was mostly made up of Gentiles. People like us!
- The year is probably 48-49AD -
- And Paul writes this letter because he has heard some greatly distressing news.
- He has heard that some people from a Jewish background were trying to convince the Gentiles that they needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. They were trying to convince them that they needed to follow the Torah, follow the Law in order to be saved.
- They were trying to put a burden on the gentile believers. Enslave them almost.
- But Paul writes saying that in no way is this the case.
- The way that we are saved isn't through law-following or circumcision - but only through the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- The Christian isn't bound in chains to law following, but is radically and gloriously freed from sin and death through the Gospel.

- **The Apostle of God**
- Let's get into it.
- A letter usually begins with a greeting of sorts, and Galatians is no different:
- 1:1 "Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead— and all the brothers who are with me, To the churches of Galatia:"
- Paul begins by laying out his credentials.

- Because it was quite possible that the people trying to lead the Galatians astray may have been trying to discredit Paul.
- You can imagine Paul's opposers saying something along the lines of:
 - *Who is this Paul bloke anyway? He didn't actually meet Jesus like those other people...he used to round up followers of this Jesus person and put them in prison!*
 - *What are his credentials??*
- But Paul puts that to bed immediately introducing himself as an apostle.
 - Apostle means a messenger...an envoy. Someone who is sent out.
 - The original apostles were those who had followed Jesus in his earthly ministry and then had seen him resurrected after his death.
- But Paul is different. No, he didn't follow Jesus in his earthly ministry, yes he did once persecute the early church - but he did see the resurrected Jesus!
- And on that road to Damascus, Jesus himself gave him the commission and the mission to be an apostle of his.
- That's why Paul writes that his appointment wasn't man-made - but directly from Jesus!
- This means that Paul's words come with the authority of Jesus. What Paul writes holds the same authority as the words of Jesus.
- Paul is writing the Word of God as inspired by Jesus.

- Which means for us here today - these words hold authority over us. Yes, we need to "mind the gap" and take into consideration the specific context that Paul was addressing. But after we've done that work, we need to hear these words as God's word to us.
 - *I remember having a conversation with someone who claimed to be Christian, Anglican even!*
 - *And he said that he followed Jesus, not Paul. That Paul took Jesus' words out of context and in a completely different direction to what Jesus would have wanted...*
- Well, that's just frankly wrong! We don't get the freedom to reject Paul's words, because Paul speaks God's words to us!
- He is an Apostle of God.
- Who Speaks of the Gospel of God.

- **The Gospel of God**
- Paul addresses the church of Galatia, beginning with this:
 - 1:3 "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."
- He greets them. He prays that they may experience and know of the grace and peace that comes from God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
- And this grace and peace can only come through what Jesus has done for us. It can only come because of the Gospel which Paul lays out clearly here.
- The Good News of Jesus or the Gospel is central to the book of Galatians.
- And it's the amazing truth and fact, that Jesus Christ gave himself, he sacrificed himself, he laid down his life for us to save us from our sins.
- That's the heart of the Gospel!
- He came to rescue us from the present age of darkness and evil, and sin - to live with him as our God with light and truth and holiness for eternity.
- His death on the cross is the center of the Gospel! And it was all according to God's plan written in eternity.
- And it's through this gospel that we can have peace. We can be at peace. Knowing that we are deeply loved, and greatly rescued from guilt, shame, and sin. We have been freed!
- All through the Gospel of God. Which is unique. There is no other Gospel.

- **The Uniqueness of the Gospel**

- Now usually in Paul's other letters there is a note of thanksgiving for the people he is writing to and prayers for them. Seven of them begin with some form of thanksgiving but not so with the Galatians.
- The Galatians get hit with a severe rebuke. Paul isn't just slightly perturbed, he is absolutely dumbfounded.
 - *I remember one time driving through fortitude valley*
 - *I was stopped at a red light wanting to go straight ahead through an intersection and there was someone in the opposite direction wanting to turn right.*
 - *My light went green and I started off having clearly the right of way - but then this other driver just pulled out completely in front of me to turn right, completely disregarding the road rules - I slammed on my brake, sat on my horn, and had a few choice words to the effect of "What on earth were you thinking!!"*
- Well Paul is essentially saying to the Galatians here "What on earth are you thinking!"
- He is astonished, he's dumbfounded, he's flabbergasted, he's gobsmacked at the stupidity of the Galatians and their rash decision to turn away from the Gospel -
- V6 "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ."
 - Paul is probably writing within a year or two of his initial visit to Galatia and so it hasn't taken long for false teaching to take hold in the hearts of the believers!
 - They are a fickle bunch turning to false teaching.
- They have begun to depart from the truth of the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
- They have been lured into believing lies, different "gospels" - which Paul reminds us aren't good news at all.
- There is no other Gospel other than what God has given us in Jesus!
- Any addition to it, subtraction from it, or distortion of it - turns it into not good news at all. It turns it into something completely different - bad news!
 - *I don't mind a bit of baking here and there.*
 - *And I don't mean to toot my own horn but do make a half-decent pavlova that my mum taught me to make*
 - *Essentially - it's just egg-whites and sugar whipped up all together.*
 - *But when separating the eggs - you have to be really careful not to let any trace of an egg yolk in.*
 - *If there is any addition of fat into the meringue mixture, it all completely falls flat and you end up with something completely different. A mess.*
- If we make any addition to the gospel of Jesus Christ - then we end up with something completely different.
- And you might be thinking - "Michael, I would never do such a thing"! And I'm sure you may not on purpose, but sometimes we can subconsciously add terms and conditions onto the unconditional love of Christ.
 - We can so easily slide back into legalism and think that yes, we might be forgiven, but now we need to live better than we are now for God to *really* forgive us...
 - We can so easily doubt our forgiveness because we don't think that our performance is up to scratch...
 - We can so easily compare ourselves to other Christians and think that we're not good enough for God because we don't pray enough, read our bible enough, give enough, serve enough...
- We do it all the time!

- How many times have you heard someone tell you “I’m not a very good Christian”...How many times have you told yourself that in your mind??
- Well cut it out, because that’s adding terms and conditions and strings to the Gospel! You’re either saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus through faith in him or you’re not!
- As soon as we try to distort the gospel by adding to it our own terms and conditions - we are declaring that the cross of Christ isn’t enough, that his grace isn’t enough - and that’s not the Gospel.
- That’s what the people in Galatia were being told! The disruptors were telling them that the Gospel wasn’t enough, telling them that they needed to add on extra stuff!
- And they were buying into it - and that’s why Paul is so passionate in this letter, because they were being sold a lie. They were being dragged back into slavery and death.
- That’s why he writes: V8 “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”
- If anyone preaches a different gospel, a strings-attached gospel, a deficient gospel - then they deserve to be sent to hell. To suffer the curses. They deserve God’s anger because they are distorting his grace and potentially taking others with them!
- Paul even includes himself here - and I’ll include myself for good measure as well!
- If any teacher or messenger tries to teach a different good news in the name of Jesus, then they deserve God’s anger.
- And these teachers are alive and well in churches today.
- Here are some common non-gospels that you might hear taught in mainstream churches by false teachers:
 - Universalism: The belief that everyone will go to eternal life anyway no matter what they have done or what religion they believe...NOT A GOSPEL
 - Prosperity Gospel: The belief that Jesus came to give us health and wealth and that if people trust hard enough, they can get anything...NOT A GOSPEL
 - Social Justice Gospel: The belief that God wants his followers to be good-moralistic citizens without any reference to salvation or sin...NOT A GOSPEL
 - Religiousity: The belief that God only wants us to do stuff for him like doing religious practises, taking communion, getting baptised, without any impact on any other area of life....NOT A GOSPEL
- If anyone teaches these things - if I teach any of these things - let me be cursed.
- And this may seem like strong language or a bit over the top, but it’s not. Because what is at stake here is the salvation of people’s souls, and the misrepresentation of the grace and glory of God!
- So how do we make sure we aren’t taken captive by false gospels that aren’t real gospels at all?
- By soaking ourselves in the truth of the gospel and plumbing the depths of God’s grace.
- By reminding ourselves time and time again of the fact that Jesus Christ loved us so much that he came to save sinners like you and me through his sacrificial death and resurrection for us.
- We can do this in so many simple and easy ways:
 - Through things such as:
 - Daily bible reading, listening to biblical worship music, meeting up with friends and speaking about Jesus and the gospel and applying it to our lives,
 - For families, listen to Christian kids music, read the bible with your children!
 - in our prayers - praise God for who he is and for what he has done for us in Jesus!
 - There’s no such thing as a grace-graduate! But soak it in.
- Because there is only one Gospel. One good news. One Lord and Saviour - Jesus Christ.