

Let's Worship God

13th-18th May 2024
Galatians



Galatians

Monday - Galatians 1:1-2 - Why You Need To Listen To This Letter

For the next several weeks we will be taking a break from our study in Isaiah to look at the book of Galatians. We will be using notes taken from a sermon series preached by Rev. Stephen Steele (Stranraer RPCS).

In this letter to the Galatians, Paul is writing to a church that is under threat of attack. He's writing, actually to a number of different congregations, all of which are under threat from men who want to destroy them. It's a threat from false teachers. If a church is attacked by false teaching, it's not always obvious. Most people won't notice. Even some inside the church won't notice. Whole churches and denominations can be choked to death by false teaching, slowly, subtly and over many years, with no-one ringing the alarm. And so Paul sits down to write this urgent letter to warn the churches of Galatia.

And this is a letter which God has used many times since to call people back to the true gospel. Most famously, he did it over 500 years ago, when the Reformation swept across Europe. It was a time when large sections of the church had gradually accepted the same false teaching that was being taught in the churches in Galatia. And what was the false teaching? It was that Jesus wasn't enough. In Galatia the teaching was - to get to Heaven you need to believe in Jesus AND be circumcised. Before the Reformation, the teaching was - to get to Heaven you need to believe in Jesus AND do good works. But in both cases it was absolutely deadly. Because when you try to add something to Jesus, you end up losing the gospel.

Maybe you think that either you individually or we as a church aren't in any need of a letter like this. Well in response to that I would say two things:

- Firstly, the natural tendency of all of us is to think that we can earn God's favour by what we do. We think: I need to do something to earn God's favour in the first place. Or else if we sin as Christians we think: I need to do something to get back in God's good books. Many of us are recovering Pharisees - and it doesn't take much to slip back into that old way of thinking.

- But then secondly, we need to know this letter so we're fortified against future attacks.

Questions

1. What is Paul warning the churches about?
2. Why do we need this letter?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for the warnings God gives us in His Word.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

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. Galatians 1:8

Praise: Psalm 44 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Tuesday - Galatians 1:1-2 - This Is A Message From God Not Man

Paul begins nearly all his other letters in very similar ways. But Galatians is different. And that makes it really stand out. One of the ways we see this right away is in v1, where Paul goes into a lot more detail about his apostleship than normal. He really dwells on the fact that he hasn't been made an apostle by men.

So why is he so keen to stress that? Well it seems from the rest of the letter that part of the strategy of the false teachers was to belittle Paul. In some ways, Paul was an easy target. Unlike the other Apostles, he hadn't followed Jesus when he was on earth. And so it's not hard to imagine them saying: That Paul. He's not a real Apostle! He wasn't around when Jesus was on earth. He's got the message wrong. You don't need to listen to him.

And so for the sake of that message Paul must defend his calling. If it was just his reputation that was at stake, that wouldn't really matter. But the gospel's at stake.

The word Apostle means sent. And Paul says that he has been sent directly by Jesus Christ. He hasn't been sent from men. Paul was commissioned on the road to Damascus when he met with the risen Lord Jesus.

What does all that mean? It means that his message is God's message. He writes with the full weight of his apostolic authority. And so the Galatians back then - and us today - must listen. To listen to this book is to listen to Jesus. To reject the authority and teaching of this book is to reject the authority and teaching of Jesus.

And notice that in v2 Paul mentions all the brothers who are with him. By mentioning them he's saying: we're all on the same page. He's saying: I'm not some lone ranger teaching doctrines that no-one has ever heard before.

One thing that should encourage us as a small church is that just like in v2, we have many brothers who are with us. Many people around the world today, and in the history of the church, who believe the same things.

Questions

1. Why does Paul emphasise his calling?
2. Where does his message come from?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for the Word of God.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

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. Galatians 1:8

Praise: Psalm 45 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Wednesday - Galatians 1:3-5 - The Gospel Itself Is At Stake

The two words 'grace' and 'peace' that Paul uses in his greeting are only possible because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They sum up God's great work of salvation. Grace is God's undeserved favour. We see it most clearly in what Jesus did on the cross. And as a result, we have peace. Peace with God, and peace with one another. A false gospel attacks grace. Because it says that there is something we can contribute to our salvation. And once grace is destroyed, peace follows. Because if it depends on us, then we can never know when we've done enough. And our lives will be full of anxiety, wondering if our best is good enough. And even if we convince ourselves that we ARE good enough for God, then all we'll have is a false peace. And of course God's grace and peace are seen most clearly at the cross. And that's where Paul goes next. In v4 he moves straight to talking about Jesus, 'who gave himself for our sins'.

For Paul, the cross is always at the centre. And it too is under threat from the false teaching. Because if the Galatians can get right with God by being circumcised, then they don't really need the cross. And if we can get right with God by being nice to people and giving to charity and being good neighbours and doing our best - then we don't need the cross either.

But what is the cross? It's a rescue mission. v4 again: 'Who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age'. We're drowning in sin. And we're so used to it, we hardly notice. And at any moment, the flood of God's wrath is going to overflow and sweep us away. But Jesus comes and rescues us. He entered this present evil age, so he by his death might usher in a new age. That's what he achieved on the cross. And Paul's saying - don't go back. That's what the false teachers want the Galatians to do. To go back to the muck and the slime and, ultimately, to death.

Here in v5, Paul is giving all the praise and glory and honour to God. Why? Because false teaching robs God of his glory. The message that was being spread around Galatia was that to get to Heaven you needed to believe in Jesus and be circumcised. And that robs God of his glory. Because it means that what really gets people over the line and into Heaven is something that they do. This false gospel was robbing God of his glory.

Questions

1. Why was this false teaching attacking the gospel?
2. Why was this false teaching robbing God of His glory?

Prayer Points

1. Give thanks for the salvation we have in Christ.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

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. Galatians 1:8

Praise: Psalm 46 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Thursday - Galatians 1:6 - Departing From The Gospel is Possible

The opening words of v6 are abrupt and startling. 'I am astonished'. So what is it that has so astonished him? It's that the people in Galatia who he's just preached to are deserting the gospel. Paul isn't astonished that people are deserting the gospel - it's right there in Jesus' parable of the sower. 3 of the 4 types of people will start off enthusiastically in the Christian life - but only one soil will endure to the end. What does astonish Paul is that it's happened so quickly.

How quickly we as human beings can change our opinion about things that are so serious! The same crowd that cried 'Hosanna to the Son of David' would be shouting 'crucify him' before the week was out. How quickly we get dissatisfied with the good things of God! And we see that human tendency to shift quickly from the gospel itself here in Galatians. To run after a different gospel other than the one God has set down in His Word.

And the fact that this letter exists at all should be a solemn reminder to us that it is possible to depart from the gospel. This isn't just theory. It happens painfully often, and the result is carnage. As Paul will write to Timothy years later: 'the Spirit expressly says that some will depart from the faith'. And the experience of the church over the last 2,000 years has sadly proved the truth of that statement. Some do it soon after they first profess faith in Christ - just like the Galatians do here. Others run the Christian race for many years and fall away with the finish line in sight. Yes, those who are truly saved will make it to the end. That should give us confidence. Our making it to the end doesn't depend on us, but on God's keeping grace. Jesus won't lose any of his sheep. And yet at the same time, the final proof that someone is one of Jesus' sheep is that they'll make it to the end. But sadly, some who seem to be Jesus' sheep, prove by their actions that they were never his sheep to begin with. And that's the danger in Galatia. Some are deserting the true gospel and turning to a false one. And if they do, they won't make it to the end.

Questions

1. Why is Paul astonished?
2. Will a true believer make it to the end?

Prayer Points

1. Pray that we would hold fast to Christ.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

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. Galatians 1:8

Praise: Psalm 47 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Friday - Galatians 1:7-9 - Departing From The Gospel is Deadly

Notice that Paul doesn't say in vs 6: 'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the gospel'. He says 'I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him'. To turn from the gospel is to turn from God. There is no other way of getting right with him. It's a matter of eternal life and death - and so Paul sits down and writes this letter. It's not too late for the Galatians. By writing this letter, Paul is trying to bring them back from the brink. And actually, what Paul does here is a really good example of what to do when we see a fellow Christian going down a wrong path. There's no doubt that Paul treats the situation seriously. But notice that he doesn't write off the Galatians as beyond hope. His language is strong - but it's measured. His aim here isn't to alienate them, but to wake them up to the urgency of the situation, so that they might be recovered. He doesn't tell them that they're beyond hope. He doesn't make it personal. Yes, Paul is angry - righteously so. But his anger is directed not at those going wrong, but at those leading them astray.

His language in vs 8 and 9 makes it very clear just how serious a thing it is to teach a twisted version of the gospel. Calling them cursed isn't a rash outburst. It's his settled judgement on the matter. Paul does have the right as an Apostle to declare that someone is accursed. To say that someone is showing by their actions that they're under God's curse. We're all born under God's curse - it's not just the really bad people. But when we become Christians, we trust that on the cross Jesus took the curse that we deserved. But if someone shows by their life that they're not a believer after all, then God's curse remains on them.

This is serious business. And that's because it's not just some difference of religious opinion. It's a matter of eternal life and death. Departing from the gospel is both possible and deadly - eternally so.

So how are we to avoid such a fate? The only way is to believe in and keep believing in the true gospel. So that means we need to know what the true gospel is - and constantly be on the lookout for those trying to distort it.

Questions

1. Why is this a matter of eternal life and death?
2. What can we do if we see a Christian going down a wrong path?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for those who seem to be walking away from the Lord.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

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. Galatians 1:8

Praise: Psalm 48 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

Galatians

Saturday - Galatians 1:7-10 - Only One Gospel, But Constant Attempts To Distort It

As Christians, there are many things that could concern us as we look out at the world. But the Bible warns us again and again that the biggest danger to the church comes not from outside but from inside. That's what the issue was in Galatia. One of the key words in these verses is the word 'distort' in v7. In Galatia there were people who weren't openly denying the gospel. They weren't trying to replace the gospel with something completely different. But they were distorting it. And in a way that's even more dangerous - because it's harder to detect.

So how will you know if what someone is teaching is the true gospel or not? Well vs 7 and 8 help us here. They show us that there's one question above all that we should ask when it comes to someone who claims to be proclaiming the gospel. And that one question we should ask is: 'What are they saying?' Paul says - I don't care if he seems like an angel. In fact, I don't care if he's literally an angel. What matters is - What is he saying?

Here are a few things to look out for.

Do they give the impression that being a Christian or accepting their teaching will make your life better in every way? Do they talk about the fact that even as a faithful Christian you will suffer? Or is being a Christian for them about personal fulfillment, and being the best version of you that you can be?

Do they talk a lot about themselves? Are they the hero of every story they tell? John the Baptist said about Jesus: 'He must increase, I must decrease'.

Do they talk much about sin and judgement and repentance - or are those things largely ignored? If they are really teaching the same message that Jesus did, they'll talk about the same things he did.

It isn't popular to call out false teaching. Paul acknowledges this in v10. Pleasing man involves trying not to step on peoples' toes - especially if it's people you love and care for who are caught up, perhaps unknowingly, in false teaching. But pleasing God - and really loving people - means warning them about the dangers of false teachers.

Questions

1. Why is distorting something more dangerous?
2. What things should we look out for in someone's teaching?

Prayer Points

1. Pray for the preaching and hearing of God's Word tomorrow.
2. Use prayer points from your congregation.
3. Pray for family matters.

Memory Verse

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. Galatians 1:8

Praise: Psalm 49 - See www.rpglobalalliance.org for Psalm tune helps.

The goal of Let's Worship God is to encourage and help you in your worship of God each day.

**God tells us that
Ezra read from
the book of the Law
day after day
and that
the people of God
were filled with joy!**

Let's Worship God is produced
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