

Right then, some of us have been getting a little bit lax, and we're going to tighten up on things... I've turned a blind eye to it for a while, but I've noticed that:

- Some of you have been wearing clothes made out of blends of different types of fabric... cotton and polyester has been quite common – it's just not on... ; and*
- some of you men, I've noticed have been wearing felt hats... You think you've been smart, buying the good Akubra, instead of the cheapo wool felt... Do you understand that Akubra uses rabbit fur, and a rabbit is an unclean animal – we cannot touch them... That's right – they chew their cut (in fact, they sometimes let it pass right through, and they chew their poo)...*
- At Christmas time, I heard some of you talk about treating yourselves to some Prawns... No more. They're forbidden – unclean...*
- No more sausage sizzles – who knows what's gone into those sausages – they could be pork.*
- It's also been drawn to my attention, that some of you have been shopping on a Saturday... What part of “keep my sabbath holy”, do you not understand?*
- At least since Covid came along, you have been cleansing your hands before we worship*

(steel & knife)

- And now we're going to address the root of the problem: Men, we're going to have a little circumcision check... If*

you want to be a child of God, surely you know you need to be circumcised into the covenant of Abraham...

Now, before anybody gets up and walks out, or if you're a first-time listener on our podcast, that's **not** what we preach here.

But it's probably what we **would** be preaching, if the Apostle Paul had not written his letter to the Galatians.

We don't need to be theological geniuses to pick up on Paul's state of mind, when he wrote this letter to the Galatians. Even in the opening to this letter (that we just read just now), it's pretty easy to see that Paul's really got a bee-in-his-bonnet...

And the reason he's got a bee-in-his-bonnet, is because the very nature of the Gospel, is at stake here; And whether the Gospel is something for **all** nations/ethnicities, or whether to become a Christian, you have to also become a Jew, and therefore, keep all of the religious legalities, that were required under the Old Covenant – that's what was at stake...

Let's set the scene:

Paul is writing to a bunch of churches, in the region known as "Galatia". It's part of Modern-day Turkey (Asia). And the church in Galatia, were mostly Gentiles (non-Jews).

Paul is the one who had taken the Gospel to them – the simple Gospel message of Grace and forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ Jesus... That's the Gospel he preached, and he was

responsible for many of the churches that had been planted in that region.

But since that time, Paul had moved on (as missionaries do), preaching the Gospel in **other** lands,,, and a group of people (who we now call, “Judaisers”), came into town, and they told the Galatians, “Hey, if you want to be a Christian, first you have to become a Jew, because Jesus is the Saviour of the Jews, and for a start, you blokes had better get yourselves circumcised, because that’s the mark of being the people of God.”....

Now, it seems the touchstone – the not-negotiables – those things that set the Jews apart, and made them distinct from the Gentiles, (the bear minimum {if you like}), centred on the issues of circumcision and food laws.

Now, something that I’ve noticed, is when a group of people really, truly desire to honour God (with every part of their being), if somebody (seemingly in authority) tells them a few simple practical things they need to do, or practices they need to keep (to make God happy), well, they’ll just do it – there’s not any harm in it (is there?)... Or is there???

Well actually, “Yes, there is.”

And so this letter that Paul wrote to the Galatians – it’s a very important letter... The teaching of the Judaisers – he had to nip that in the bud. God was doing a new thing here. The death and resurrection of Jesus was His means of salvation for the **nations** (not just the Jews)... And yet the Judaisers were

putting a whole heap of hurdles in front of them (& burdens on their backs), trying to make them carry the burden of the religious law (that even the Jews hadn't been able to carry)...

And all this is going to come out (as we study this letter).

So, if Paul is making an argument against people who are (seemingly) in authority, the first thing he has to do is state **his** credentials – what's **his** authority?

Well, Paul claims to be an Apostle... In the Greek, the word means “one who is sent (envoy)”. But in the early church, to be designated as an apostle, was to be recognised as a person of great foundational authority.

So, e.g.: When **Judas** died, Peter pointed out that they needed to select a replacement. And they narrowed it down to two men: **Acts 1:23**, **Joseph called Barsabbas, who was also called Justus, and Matthias.**

And what made them suitable, was the fact that they'd been following Jesus right from the start, right through to the end; they had heard/knew the teachings of Jesus; but the most critical point, was they had to have been eye witnesses to the resurrected Jesus... So, they came up with Joseph & Matthias, and they cast lots, and Matthias became an apostle.

And I've said this before – “I would be very wary of **anyone** who claims to be an apostle today”. The role of an apostle in

the early church, was to clarify and make known what the true Gospel is, and to be witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus.

The Apostolic testimony that they gave, is now recorded in the books of the New Testament.

But Paul is different to this. He **didn't** walk with Jesus. And in fact, before he became a Christian, he was dead against Jesus, and oversaw the persecution of the followers of Jesus... In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul refers to himself as the least of the apostles, and quite literally, an **abortion** of an apostle... the ESV puts it nicely "as to one untimely born".

But Paul was called, and sent by the resurrected Jesus Christ, Himself. That's a pretty high calling.

Saul (a good Jewish name {called back then}), was on the road to Damascus, to arrest more Christians (he **so** hated them).... And he was struck by a bright light:

Acts 9:(ESV)

⁴ And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "**Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?**" ⁵ And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**" ⁶ **But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."**

Meantime, Jesus spoke to a **believer** by the name of Ananias. He was reluctant to go and visit Saul, because he thought it must be a trap. But Jesus told him to go and pray for him, and the Lord said:

15 ... "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶ For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

Jesus was appointing Saul (Greek name: Paul) as an Apostle. And I find it amazing, that Saul (this Jew's Jew), was sent by Jesus, and actually became the main apostle to the Gentiles – to the non-Jews.

And I suspect this could be **one** of the reasons why **Paul** was the one who stood **against** the Judaizers... He had at one time, been **zealous** for the Law, but the zeal for the Law (that Saul had), was the very thing that motivated him to persecute the Son of God (and His church)...

Imagine how Saul must've felt – believing that he was doing everything he could for God, and then having the encounter (where he's stopped in his tracks on the road to Damascus), and the Son of God confronts him – "You're persecuting me".... Oops....

So Paul wasn't initially chosen and appointed as an apostle by men – he was appointed as an Apostle, by Jesus Christ

Himself, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead....

And as an Apostle, his job, is to preach the Gospel. And he reminds us what the Gospel is, right here, in the opening words of this letter – he wants to remind them, what’s at stake:

Grace,,,, & Peace....

We don’t come to peace with God through works; We don’t come to peace with God through keeping religious rules and regulations – it’s entirely by grace. But what’s this grace look like?

The Lord Jesus Christ **gave Himself** [He died on the cross. Why?], **for our sins, to deliver** [rescue] **us from the present evil age...**

That’s what grace is. The Son of God gave His life, to rescue us from our hopeless predicament...

And it wasn’t an accidental thing. This is the will of our Heavenly Father. You know, the Old Covenant (in the Old Testament), that wasn’t God’s (failed) first attempt, and “Oh well, that didn’t work, so I guess I’d better try something else.” (Not at all)...

All of the Old Covenant, was all building up – it was all part of God’s master plan, to rescue us with the blood of Jesus...

Jesus Himself told us, that He is the fulfillment of the Law...

Alright, that's the simple Gospel message that Paul had preached to them in the beginning – Grace and Peace, through the shed blood of Jesus... And that's the message that we preach today. And how do we respond? (The Gospel isn't any good, unless I tell you how we need to respond)... We kneel before Jesus as Lord. We confess our sins to Him, and we ask for forgiveness...

What then??? Circumcision??? Change of diet??? No. That misses the whole point. We give our whole lives over to Jesus, to live by the Spirit. We don't try and appease Him by washing our hands before a meal, or by keeping a New Moon Festival...

That's the Gospel message that Paul preached. That's the Gospel message the Galatians had received.

But these trouble makers came into town, and said "That's not enough"...

And Paul is absolutely astonished... And as a Pastor, I get this. I was talking to another pastor in town just this week, and he and I are both astonished (in a bad way) (shocked), that some people who we thought were good solid Christians,

so easily depart from the true Gospel, to embrace a new, more appealing teaching... I don't get it... Why???

V6

⁶I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel

Who are they deserting? Are they just deserting the preacher? No. Are they just deserting the message? No. They are deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ ...

To turn to a different Gospel, is to desert God. It's to desert:

- God the Father, who planned the Gospel (His rescue mission) through the ages;
- God the Son, who gave Himself (for this very grace);
- God the Holy Spirit, who is the one who calls and leads us to the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ....

But the thing is, there is only one Gospel – And if the Gospel message ever gets changed (tweaked a little bit), it becomes a distortion – it's a lie of the Devil...

And basically what Paul's saying here, is "I don't care who tells you another Gospel, if it isn't the Gospel that you heard me preach, and you responded to it, then it isn't the Gospel..."

Do you know why false gospels are so dangerous??? It's because many who respond to a false Gospel, believe that they're now saved... But they're not...

And so Paul says:

⁸ 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. ⁹ 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.

Wohh!! Them's fightin' words...

He said it once, and then he repeated it. Now, if you're familiar with Paul's letter writing, he doesn't waste words. **He's adamant here** – there is no debate... If anyone preaches a different gospel to the age-old Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ, let him be accursed...

I'm a preacher. I don't want to be accursed, and even more so, I do not **ever** want to lead anyone astray. So, it's really important to be able to tell the difference between the true Gospel, and a distorted Gospel...

How does the Gospel get distorted today? Well, there's 2 common ways, and they're opposites of each other...

The sort of distortions that we see most commonly (today), is to water the Gospel down – it’s to remove the offense from it... In a lot of churches, they’ll never mention sin... And some preachers will never preach, the need to repent of sin, and ask for forgiveness....

I had a person tell me the other day, that we don’t need to confess our sins to God, because we’re already forgiven... And I said to him, “Well why, did Jesus teach us to pray, , “Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”” ...

Repentance and the forgiveness of sins go hand in hand... And, if the Gospel that’s being preached, is something that tries to take away the offence of the Gospel, then it isn’t the Gospel, and accursed be anyone who preaches it....

But the distortion of the Gospel that Paul stood against (in this letter to the Galatians), is the opposite to this. It tried to add to the Gospel, which actually took away from the grace...

And the issue that we’re going to see in this letter, is what Paul refers to as “works of the law”... And we’re going to talk about this more in following weeks, but I do need to say this (right from the outset):

As we study this letter, it’s going to be really important that we do not confuse “works of the Law”, and not doing “works of the Law” – let’s not confuse that with “lawlessness”...

God delights in when we keep God's Law – that's about doing the right thing, and God loves that. ...

And towards the end of Galatians, Paul's going to talk about "living by the Spirit", where, as we live with Christ in our hearts, we actually do what the law requires... and BTW, if we're **not** living righteously (living according to the flesh), that means we're out of step with God...

Alright, so let's be really clear (right from the outset), Paul is not at all discouraging the Galatians from living righteously – that's not what's at issue... What **is** at issue, and what Paul is really angry about, is that the Gospel is being changed to say, "You non-Jewish Christians, you have to get circumcised, and you have to start only eating Kosher food." ...

Alright, are you with me???

And I'm telling you this, because it's not uncommon, to come up against people who would appeal to Galatians, and say, "Don't try and be a good person, because that's 'legalism' – that's a work of the law" But you know what? Paul wouldn't have a bar of that...

The true Gospel is, "There is no one righteous. Not one of us can save ourselves by being good. We are all saved by grace. And through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. We kneel before Him; we beg for forgiveness, and we are made whole..."

But if we start adding anything to this, it's not the gospel, and accursed be the preacher...

On a personal note:

It's a humbling thing, to be a preacher of the Gospel of Jesus Christ... The stakes are high... The stakes are high for those who hear the Gospel – it must be the true gospel. And the stakes are high for the preacher... If I start tweaking the gospel to make it more appealing, or less offensive,, I am accursed... Ouch...

Do we understand how important the true Gospel is??? Jesus gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil age... Let's never desert Him, by turning to a different Gospel.

Let's Pray:

Heavenly Father,
We want to thank You, That You have called us
to Your wonderful, lifegiving Gospel.

Lord Jesus Christ,
We thank You, that You willingly gave Yourself,
to rescue us from this evil age.

Forgive us, for when we hold on to this world,
as if it's something grand.
When You rescue us from it,
and you call it "this present evil age"

Lord, we ask that You would
help us to always know and recognise
the true Gospel.

That we would hold fast to this,
Never taking from it.

Never adding to it...,

because Your rescue plan is perfect, just the way it is.

We praise You Lord,

Amen.