

*As a Pastor, I sometimes find myself giving a message at community events. I had 2 of them in the last week. I had to give a message and pray at 2 ANZAC services, and I preached at a funeral...*

*And it's a tough gig, speaking at these times, because I know I've been given an opportunity to share the Gospel. And share the Gospel, I **will** – that's my duty **and** my passion. But I also know that if I share the true gospel as the true Gospel is, a few people will receive it as words of life and of freedom.... But I also know that **many** people (who are not disciples of Jesus), will find the Gospel 'offensive' (deeply offensive)...*

And the temptation, is ever before a preacher, to just 'tweak' the Gospel a little bit, to remove the offense – to water it down, to make it more palatable to the audience...

But that's the thing – the offence of the Cross, is very much a part of what the Gospel is – so much so, that Paul says of himself (in an around-about sort of a way), that if he **wasn't** being persecuted, the offence of the cross must've been removed, and therefore he wouldn't have been preaching the true Gospel...

It makes you think, doesn't it – in our day-and-age of watered-down, inoffensive Christianity...

So, what's so offensive about the cross??? Well, the offense of the cross is many and varied and **opposites** will find it offensive (for opposite reasons)...

In our culture, the offense of the cross will generally be very different to the offense that Paul is describing in Galatia, but then (in other ways), the offense can be very similar.

So, in our culture, I reckon these would be, the 2 greatest ways that Australians consider the Gospel to be offensive:

1. The cross tells me I am a sinner in need of a saviour.

Most people are living in the delusion that it's the bad people who go to Hell, and it's the good people who go to Heaven,,, And they can easily point to a few people, who they're sure didn't make the grade, but they and their friends and family, are the nice people who have done enough good things and not too many bad things, and so on the day of judgment, it's all going to be good...

But the Gospel of Jesus Christ, completely demolishes any sense of self-righteousness (that we might have)...

The message of the Cross is, we are **all** sinners – every one of us... And not one of us has enough righteousness of our own. But God loves us so much, that His Son came and died for us, that by His Grace and Mercy, He can take our sin away...

And so all who repent of sin, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and turn their hearts over to Him, are saved.

The cross tells me, "I am a sinner in need of a Saviour", and to many people, that's offensive...

2. And the second way I reckon **many** Australians are offended by the Cross, is because the Gospel is exclusive.

In a society that tends to value “tolerance” above all other virtues (BTW, I don’t think “tolerance” is a virtue – in fact, **never** in the Scriptures, is “tolerance” described as a virtue)... But when that’s what our society values, (live & let live) – when tolerance is what’s valued, the Gospel that says “Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved” – that message is hated...

But that doesn’t stop it from being the Gospel. Jesus said: John 14: (ESV) <sup>6</sup> .... “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

The Gospel is 100% exclusive. God’s plan of salvation (if rejected), has no back-up. There **is** no alternative. We don’t get to choose our provider...

And our God – the one true God, is a god of **truth**, and therefore, He will not tolerate, worship being given to any other god – why not? – because that’s a lie... And if our God is a God of truth, He cannot tolerate a lie...

And so, we unashamedly proclaim the **exclusivity** of Jesus Christ...

Now, let me clarify this:

The Gospel isn’t exclusive in the way some people are welcome and others are not – in fact, that’s what the Book of Galatians is about – Christianity is the most **in**clusive way to be saved – the Gospel is proclaimed to Male and Female; Jew

and Gentile; To slave and free. All who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, are one in Christ Jesus... In **that** way, it's **inclusive**, but there is no other way, and so it's exclusive... Are you with me? All are invited, but there is only one God for us to come to...

But the issue at hand (in Paul's letter to the Galatians) is a bit different to this. In every culture, the offence of the Gospel will be a bit different, but in some ways, similar...

And the offence that Paul is talking about, is the cross tells me that Christ is sufficient. Nothing else is needed...

Verse 1 pretty much sets out the whole reason for this letter to the Galatians: **5 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.**

You see, the message of the Gospel, is that Christ has set us free from our sin and deserved judgement. **For freedom Christ has set us free**, and this freedom is to be lived.

*When I was in Bible College, Robyn and I were worshipping at a local suburban church in Brisbane. It was weird – there were churches everywhere. We walked to church on a Sunday morning (we were that close), and there were 2 other churches of the same denomination that were closer... Weird...*

*Anyway, there was this lady who started coming to church. And I engaged her in a conversation about faith & Christ & church... And she said something to me that I've never heard before:*

*She said:*

*“Christianity and church is all a bit new to me, so I've decided I'm going to come to **this** church for a little while, because it's not so religious.” And what she meant by that is:*

- *a very contemporary sort of a service;*
- *a few instruments in the band;*
- *families were involved;*
- *kids were a large part of the church;*
- *Usually the minister didn't wear religious garb;*
- *no smells or bells;*
- *didn't follow a fixed liturgy out of a book*

*It was pretty much like church here, really...*

*And then she told me her plan, to start out here, because it was engaging and wasn't foreign to her, (and this is my word – not hers), but after a while, she would graduate to attending one of the inner city cathedrals where religion was much more proper...*

- *pipe organ;*
- *smells and bells*
- *liturgy was out of a book;*
- *minister would be wearing his dressing gown and pretty scarves around his neck*

.....

*You see, her understanding was, “I need something more than Christ, but I'm going to have to work up to it...”*

And as I've told you over the last couple of months, what was going on in Galatia, was these Judaisers had come into town, and told them that Christ wasn't enough – and they had to add some Old Covenant religious stuff to their faith. And one of the key issues, was circumcision... “If you want to be a Christian, you've got to get circumcised like we Jews are....”

And Paul was **ropable**. If you didn't notice his anger (righteous anger) coming through in the reading, well you weren't listening very well. He wasn't pulling any punches... And with good reason. <sup>12</sup> **I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!**

You see, at one time, these Galatians had been pagans – worshiping a whole bunch of different gods. But Christ had set them free from that – they'd been set free from their religious enslavement to false gods... And they were living in freedom...

But then, along come these Jewish Christians saying, “It's good that you believe in Jesus, but for you to be a good Christian, you've now got to keep the Jewish religious laws and regulations, and let's start with circumcision...”

Now, the issue with circumcision, it's not an issue of the surgery itself, or even an issue with the tradition... The problem (as Paul points out), is if you think it's going to make you a better Christian... Basically, what Paul's telling these people, is “If you guys accept the **need** for circumcision, you're rejecting the Gospel you received.”

Here's the logic of the argument:

- If they accept that they are obliged to keep **some** of the Old Covenant Religious Law;
- that severs them from Christ... Because faith in Christ, is to accept that Christ is enough. And by deciding “Faith in Christ **isn't** enough – I also have to do these religious acts” and take part in these religious ceremonies – that's a rejection the Gospel of being saved by faith;
- So therefore, if I want to be justified by the Law (and religious observances), I have to keep **all** of the Law... And Paul has already demonstrated that that's not do-able...

Basically, Paul's saying, “It's a package deal”. If I ‘sign up’ for **some** of the Old Covenant package, I have to sign up for all of it... which means I've rejected freedom in Christ, and become a slave to the law...

Can you understand why Paul's so cranky?

- They were slaves to false gods;
- But then, they were set free in Christ Jesus;
- But now they're being enslaved by those who were preaching the Old Covenant Law...

In V4, he says that if you seek to be justified by the **law**:

- <sup>4</sup>You are severed from Christ;
- you have fallen away from grace.

How free are we in Christ? I'll tell you how free we are:

<sup>5</sup> For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness.

- There's no doing/striving/working for it – it's all by faith;
- We're not busily trying to achieve righteousness – we wait for it – God gives righteousness to us...

*Over the years, Robyn and I have run a lot of church camps and stuff, and with Robyn as the chief and me as the helper, over the years we've done a fair bit of catering for camps (Robyn more so than me),,, but then other times, we **didn't** have to work for it... At meal times, we would sit and wait, and the food would come out to us.*

That's the image we're supposed to get here – the righteousness of Christ comes to us by grace. We don't have to go and prepare our righteousness, or improve on our righteousness – Christ has done that for us at the cross...

You see, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile doesn't matter. Whether you're circumcised or uncircumcised, doesn't matter – it doesn't count for anything. Nothing else counts, but only faith working through love.

You know, when you become a Christian, you move out of God's condemnation, but be prepared for the **world's** condemnation.

You see, the world is offended by the Gospel, and the world's idea of love, is that "If you offend me, then you obviously don't love me." Nothing could be further from the truth. Christianity is not at all loveless. The love begins with God. **God so loved the world, that He sent His one and only Son.**

And for faith to be effective, it **has** to be connected with love – it **has** to be **working through love.**

And I think this love is a two-way thing – it's the love that God has for us; but also the love He enables us to have for Him.

Evangelicalism, in the desire to rack up the number of 'converts', has cheapened what faith is... And I'm going to come down hard on evangelicals, because we are an evangelical church... Somehow we evangelicals have rendered "faith" down into something we call "the sinners prayer", and if I can get you to say the sinners prayer, you've become a Christian, and I can chalk you up as another convert...

But the only thing that counts, is **faith working through love.**

*If I visit a dying person (laying on their hospital bed), and manage to get them to say the sinners prayer, that's not what counts – it's a matter of the heart, you see... The sinners prayer is only effective, if it is verbalising the faith we have in our heart, and the love that we have for the God who loved us first...*

And I think you know this, don't you???

Righto. Now at this point, Paul's anger, turns from the false message, to the false teachers who have given it. Paul was a shepherd, who would always vigilantly guard the flock.

<sup>7</sup> You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth?

Living the Christian life, is a bit like Wacky Races... Now, stick with me here:

Living the Christian life, is like running a race:

- don't let anything distract us or trip us up;
- just keep on running;
- Keep your eyes fixed on the goal;
- Follow Christ....

*Is anyone here old enough to remember "Dick Dastardly" or his evil dog, "Muttley" from the cartoon "Wacky Races?"*

*[[[[ Play video clip... ]]]]*

*Alright, so in Wacky Races, there's all these people running the race, but then there's Dick Dastardly & Muttley, who try to trip them all up, and cut in, and slow them down...*

Paul's wanting to know, "Who's the 'Dick Dastardly' / 'Muttley' that's hindered you, and interfered with your race, and stopped you from obeying the Gospel?"

And he says, <sup>8</sup> This persuasion is not from Him who calls you.

Did you know that not everything you hear in a church, and not every persuasive teaching that comes from a preacher's mouth, is of God??? And that's why we need to be discerning.

This is a sad reality, but right throughout history, and very-much-so today, (and possibly more-so today), various

- unbiblical teachings;
- side-issues;
- distractions;
- conspiracy theories;
- Political machinations

are presented as if these are things that Christians:

- need to know
- need to do
- need to care about
- need to be angry about

You need to embrace this; do this; think this; pass this on,, otherwise you're not a good Christian...

And some of these things are untrue, and therefore they're not the Gospel;

- distractions;
- side-issues;
- outright lies...

And some people grab hold of these things, and “Wow, this is something I’m passionate about”... And they believe that because it’s been persuasively presented as

- “This is the Christian Way”;
  - this is what it means to be Spiritual;
  - this has been revealed by God for you;
  - here’s a few verses to back up what I’m saying...
- 
- And because the one who has said these things, has the appearance of being ‘Godly’,

They believe it...

And they may be very persuasive words, but they’re not from God... Now, this is a hard thing to hear, but if Dick Dastardly and Muttley cut in on you, and distract you from the pure Gospel, if they’re not agents of God, who are they working for??? It’s the evil one who hinders us from obeying the truth of the Gospel.

And Paul says: <sup>9</sup> **A little leaven leavens the whole lump.**

*Now,,, I like bread. Who here likes bread?*

And most of our bread (today) is made with yeast. Yeast is the leaven that makes bread rise into a nice airy consistency, instead of a hard lump. But of course, another way to leaven bread (and the way it was back then), was to keep a piece of old mouldy dough in a jar, and when you were making bread, you’d take a piece of this old mouldy stuff, and work it in through the batch of dough... And then the respiration of the fungal activity, is what would cause the bread to rise. A tiny little bit of leaven, leavens the whole batch.

And **biblically**, “leaven” came to represent corruption – fermentation is a process of corruption – the bread’s going rotten. You just have to bake it in time, to stop it .

And what Paul’s saying, is a little bit of corruption in the church – a little bit of bad teaching – has to be stopped in its tracks. Why? Because otherwise it’s going to corrupt the whole church.

*It’s not that long ago, I was having a conversation with somebody about how the church they’re connected with, wasn’t giving biblical teaching. And I said, “Why do you stay there?” And their answer was, “Well, I know the Bible, and I know it’s wrong, and so I just don’t take any notice of it.”*

Now, there’s a couple of problems with that:

1. By them staying, others who don’t know what the Bible teaches, assume it’s OK, because here’s someone who does know what the Bible teaches, and they’re still here. And so their very presence gives an appearance of approval;
2. But a second problem, is a little leaven leavens the whole lump. They cannot remain un-affected. If it’s not rejected outright, it will corrupt the character of the whole church.

Paul’s solution for false teaching??? Well, you certainly don’t “Live and let live” ....

Deal with it. And he's quite blunt here: There is no place for a corruption of the Gospel, to be taught in the Christian Church. He's actually calling on the Galatians to judge the persuasive one who has been leading them away from obeying the true Gospel.

<sup>10</sup> I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is.

And so, a third reason the Cross – the Gospel of Jesus Christ is so offensive, is because the Gospel says that Christ is enough... We don't need to add:

- works;
- religious practices;
- particular gifts of the Holy Spirit;

We don't need to add anything.

Christ is enough.

And I think the best response to that, is worship. We might move now, into singing the song, Christ is Enough.