

Reading: Galatians 1:1-12

Paul, an apostle – sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead – and all the brothers and sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia:

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

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 – 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! 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!

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.

New International Version UK

Preaching notes:

Paul is astonished that the Galatian churches are so quickly turning from the one true gospel of Jesus. These are churches (Antioch, Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe) that he and Barnabas have laboured over, prayed for and served unstintingly during a period of months and years (see Acts 11:26).

False teachers (known as Judaisers) were continuing their opposition to the true gospel of Jesus Christ as revealed to the apostle Paul. Note how Paul begins this letter; “Paul an apostle sent not by men...but by Jesus Christ and God the Father...and all of the brothers and sisters with me”. Paul firstly establishes his authority as an apostle from God and from his fellow believers before “laying into” the Galatian churches.

Galatians dovetails so beautifully with the Acts of the Apostles, for example Acts 15:1 “certain men came down from Judea and taught the believers “unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved””. This matters because they are teaching that reliance in Christ alone is insufficient to achieve salvation. Paul reminds us that Jesus suffered and died on a Roman cross to redeem us, to rescue us from sin and bring us back from darkness and place us into God’s glorious light. To start adding other conditions for salvation, like good works, adhering to laws, attending or participating in worship is not just “a different opinion” or “contrary to Pauls theology” it is completely false. Salvation -as the great reformers have echoed throughout our history- comes by faith and trust in Jesus Christ alone.

Paul is rightly outraged, “if anyone is preaching to you a (false) gospel...let them be under God’s curse”. Paul recognises that unless this matter is challenged and overcome it will be like a festering sore and will result in the miraculous spread of the gospel to the ends of the earth being halted. John Stott, the New Testament scholar, reminds us that false teaching left unchecked will cause severe trouble to the church (the people), “the churches greatest troublemakers (now as then) are not those (non-believers) outside who oppose it but those inside who try to change the gospel. It is they who trouble the church”.

The gospel of Christ was not received by Paul from a training course, he did not even receive it from another believer. He makes clear to us it was revealed to him by Jesus Christ (see Acts 9). He is not trying to win favour or make himself or his cause popular, he is proclaiming the “gospel truth” – a phrase that we used to use to signify an incredibly special and pure truth. A higher level of truth.

In summary, Paul emphasises to us that we cannot and must not accept a diluted, weak or perverted gospel. I look forward to sharing with you in the coming weeks this ongoing message of freedom in Christ, a new redeemed life, becoming ever closer to God.
Amen.