

Gospel, Faith and Freedom

Deliverance by Christ, not man

Galatians 1

Our title 'Gospel, Faith and Freedom' identifies key emphases in this letter.

- Only what God announces with authority, his good news, can gather the conscience and affections of sinners and free them from the forces that stand against us.
- Only submissive trust in this God can release us from the flesh and the world and the devil and secure us to be what we were created to be.
- Freedom is a result of the above, not a means to human flourishing.

Paul writes to the Galatians (vv. 1-2), we may surmise, to the churches Paul established in his first recorded mission journey.

- His gospel is not from man. He will defend this throughout the chapter (vv. 10, 11, 16).
- Everything to do with our salvation begins with God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead (v. 1)—the beginning of a new creation.
- Nothing other than God's will (v. 4) and revelation of grace (vv. 12, 15) can save us.
- To him alone belongs glory (vv. 5, 23).
- Paul has been turned right side up by Christ and by the grace of God in him. He is intolerant of anything that does not pass this truth test and amazed at anyone falling for it (v. 6).
- This whole letter is an appeal for a 'top down', faith-first, grace-generated and Spirit-sparked living.

Everyone needs to be rescued from this present evil age, through Christ's giving himself for our sins (vv. 3-5).

- However people define the world, there always will be something identified as evil and from which we need liberation.
- The world must minimise and manage its dilemma but cannot finally engage or fix the problem.
- God says 'our sins' are the problem, that Christ gave himself up for these, and that this is the manner in which we are set free from the world's evil.
- 'Grace and peace from our God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ' are in direct contrast to 'this present evil age'. Therefore, our life needs to arise from God's gifts and not from reaction to the world's evil.
- This is the gospel or good news that is called in question by certain 'false brothers'.

How can we live by a message less than this gospel (vv. 6-9)?

- Paul says 'there are some who are distressing other believers and *want* to distort the gospel of Christ'. Human perversity is powerful.
- This is a problem, not with the world but with the world's self-trust infiltrating the church. As Paul will show, this false 'gospel' rises no higher than what man can produce.
- They may agree in words that justification is by faith (2:15-16), but their adding something to it renders their teaching as 'another gospel' (v. 6) or 'no gospel at all' (v. 7 NIV).
- Given the grace of the gospel, this is astonishing.
- If we have a God centred faith, we will be fighting the world, the flesh and the devil every inch of the way!
- Everyone needs to recognise what is true and false, good and evil.

- Much is at stake. Those who teach something else deserve to be cursed (vv. 8-9). Cf. Israel being taught to stone prophets who spoke from themselves (Deut. 13).

This gospel is not a human product but comes from God and directly through Christ to Paul (vv. 10-24).

- The Apostles are our direct and only link to Christ—their genuineness is critical.
- Paul vigorously defends his direct link to Christ and his appointment as an apostle (vv. 1, 10), and as a slave (v. 10) of Christ.
- Compare Jesus' assertion that his apostles are 'not of the world' and his prayer that they be sanctified—that is, uniquely God's rather than the world's (John 17:11-19).
- Christ appeared to Paul (v. 12) and revealed himself 'in' Paul (v. 16). Faith is experiential but evidence based—solidly objective first, but then, utterly subjective (cf. 1 Cor. 15:3-8).

Paul presents the moral case of his own conversion.

- He compares who he was before and after being apprehended by Christ. Later he tells us that this encounter with Christ rendered him 'dead to the world' (6:14). Faith is transformative and he is not 'of the world'.
- Paul knows the deadness of a religion that has become a mere human product (cf. 3:2-3). He knows the cruelty to which this can give rise. It becomes a culture of control needing to suppress alternatives. So he writes with understanding and even anger that Christians are reverting to that from which he has been saved.

Paul's presents circumstantial evidence that his gospel is not an adaption of something from Jerusalem.

- Christ appears to him, and all that he knows from the Old Testament and from Christian witnesses like Stephen is enlivened.
- He immediately preaches the full gospel in Damascus (Acts 9:20-23).
- His trip to Arabia (v. 17) is probably brief, and for safety reasons.
- It is three years after his conversion before he returns to Jerusalem (from where he had authority to arrest people in Damascus).
- This may well be the time when he escapes Damascus and visits Cephas and James (Acts 9:26-29).
- Again, Paul stirs up opposition and is sent off to Tarsus by the Jerusalem church.
- Paul preaches here and environs (Syria and Celicia) for some 10 years. Jerusalem believers thank God his ministry, and see no reason to question it.
- The conclusion is clear: Paul's gospel comes from Christ and Jerusalem acknowledges this.

We should defend the truth of the apostolic truth in our New Testament.

- A vigorous analysis of historical connections indicates that our New Testament is a reliable record of the words and deeds of Jesus and the power of his gospel to change people and societies.
- The world does not recognise anything miraculous as 'fact'. Revelation and grace are essentially miraculous, but this does not disqualify them from being historically examined and found to be trustworthy.
- A departure from the apostolic witness to God's grace, in word or in spirit, is 'another gospel'.

Like the apostles, we also should be full of Christ and the power of his gospel so that attempts to attribute our faith to human causes can be shown to be invalid.