



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula  
3 Stanmore Bay Road,  
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.  
[www.ststephenswgp.org.nz](http://www.ststephenswgp.org.nz)

## Sermon

### ***By Divine Authority***

**Galatians 1:11-24**

5<sup>th</sup> June 2016

© 2016 The Revd Ian Hardcastle

Today we start a short series on Galatians. This epistle is important to us because it deals with the relationship between Law and Grace - something that easily gets out of balance.

This ridge path in Cumbria, called “Striding Edge”, needs care lest one fall to the left or the right, so too we need to tread the path of liberty between the perils of legalism and licence. A fine balance is required if we are not to veer to one side or the other and fall to our peril. As with any balancing that means there have to be constant corrections.

### ***Setting of the Letter***

Who by? Who to? When? Why?

This is no doubt the letter is actually written by Paul. The letter claims it for itself in the opening words, the style and content fit Paul.

It was written to the Churches in Galatia – presumably those churches he planted on his first missionary journey. It must have been written before the Council of Jerusalem which settled the issue of this letter. Thus it would have been written about A.D. 48-49 and was the first of his epistles.

### **Why did he write this letter?**

We need to read some of the verses we missed out to get the setting:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by 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 him be eternally condemned! <sup>1</sup>

Paul, an apostle – as stated in verse 1, had preached the gospel to them and brought them to Christ, now other people have come to them and told them they must become Jews to follow Christ fully. These were Jewish preachers who agreed that Jesus was the Christ, but still insisted that one had to be a practising Jew.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gal 1:6-8

They thought if non-Jews decided to follow Christ then they must become Jews and start following the Jewish Law as the follow-through to that decision.

As you have just heard, Paul was horrified at this teaching. It was not a debatable point it was a different gospel. In fact, it was not good news but the old ways dressed up. So strongly does Paul believe this is wrong that he calls eternal condemnation down on anyone who twists and corrupts the Gospel. He rightly insists that if there were any spiritual source of a different message it would not be of God and so should be condemned.

How does he know this? Because he says, he received the message he preached by direct revelation from God. (v11) It was not a clever story made up by men. He was not taught it by others but it was what Jesus revealed to him.

To understand better his declaration we need to understand his office. He is called to be an apostle by Jesus Christ. "Apostle" means a delegate, messenger, one sent forth with orders. It is the transliteration of the Greek word. The equivalent Hebrew word would have been used by Jesus and the early disciples including Paul. It was *shaliach*, which mean a representative agent. The actions of an agent reflected on his principal. The nearest thing in our experience is an international ambassador who fully represents his leader. So Paul would understand himself to be the official representative of Jesus Christ. He had been called by Christ to represent Christ. That means his teaching is not to be regarded simply as a teacher's opinion but as the teaching of his king, Jesus.

When Paul says, "... even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned!," he is not talking church discipline – the language is far too strong for that. The Gospel has been given by Jesus Christ the incarnate God – those who try to pervert it are liable to God's judgement and damnation.

At this present time, in our culture, the danger is not excessive legalism but excessive licence.

How may that affect us? The different gospel we encounter most is the proclamation of another Jesus. The Jesus presented is often divorced from reality and certainly from the scriptural record. He was just a man with some nice thoughts – some of them were wrong but then he probably didn't say those bits. He was misunderstood and got killed – end of story – except that we might want to emulate him.

Sin – such an ugly word; atonement – not necessary because sin doesn't really matter because God just loves us – we're quite lovable really! Resurrection – don't be silly. Virgin birth – Oh come on!

That gospel is what Paul wrote about in 2 Timothy 3:5, "having a form of godliness but denying its power."

That is a false gospel presenting another Jesus. It is not true to the scriptures – it is an accommodation to unbelief. It has no power to save because it denies the need for salvation and only means of salvation.

Be careful what you read and believe. There are many voices, many writers who are presenting false gospels and many people get sucked in and deceived by them. We have no authority but the record of what Jesus and his disciples said, did and wrote. Anything else is baseless or simply not Christianity.

## **Paul's Background**

So Paul starts by warning the Galatian Christians that they are in danger of another gospel. He moves onto his authority to instruct them.

Paul had been zealous for Judaism. He was educated to the highest level in both Roman and Jewish circles. These followers of Jesus were an offence to him. No doubt he felt he must stamp out so dangerous a movement which threatened to turn Jews away from the true worship of God.

## **God's Intervention**

But then God intervened in Paul's life. He tells of his conversion twice in Acts. For example in Acts 26:12ff he wrote,

" I was going to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests. About noon, O King, as I was on the road, I saw a light from heaven, brighter than the sun, blazing around me and my companions. We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.' "Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' "'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied. 'Now get up and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen of me and what I will show you. I will rescue you from your own people and from the Gentiles. I am sending you to them to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'<sup>2</sup>

Paul had worked so hard to keep every one of the 613 rules in the Law as well as the many regulations of the traditions of the Fathers. And in a stroke, Jesus had called him to follow him and receive righteousness as a gift instead of trying (and failing) to earn it.

Now he heard that these other preachers were trying to convince his converts that they had to earn salvation after all. They taught that Jewish believers still had to keep the Law. They taught that Gentile converts must formally become Jews. Only by being circumcised and keeping the Law could they be acceptable to God. He could not allow this lie to grip their hearts. It would turn them from a trust in Jesus as Saviour back into slaves of the Law.

### ***Paul's Authority***

The main point he counters in chapters 1 & 2 is the challenge to his authority. The Judaisers would claim that they came from Jerusalem and their sources and authority were impeccable. So Paul's argument is that his authority is not derived from the apostles in Jerusalem. He is an apostle appointed directly by Jesus. That's how he started the book: "Paul, an apostle sent not from men nor by men but by Jesus Christ and God the Father..."<sup>3</sup>

That is why he emphasises so strongly that he did not learn the gospel from the other apostles in Jerusalem. His point is that he received his message directly from God by revelation – so his authority is divine not derived from the others. He has greater authority than the Judaisers.

What is the gospel that Paul preached? We will learn more as we progress through the book, but John Stott points out there is an executive summary in the opening greeting.

### ***The Gospel in Summary***

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...<sup>4</sup>

Not just the standard opening to a first century letter; Paul has adapted it.

### **Grace and peace to you**

"Grace and peace to you": Stott says,

The nature of salvation is peace – peace with God, peace with men, peace within. The source of salvation is grace, God's free favour, irrespective of human merit or works, His loving-kindness to the undeserving.<sup>5</sup>

Do you know that peace? Do you experience peace with God – knowing he is your Father; knowing you are his child; knowing he has forgiven you and washed away your sins?

---

<sup>2</sup> Acts 26:12-18

<sup>3</sup> Gal 1:1

<sup>4</sup> Galatians 1:3-4

<sup>5</sup> Stott J., 1992, *BST: The Message of Galatians*, IVP Leicester, p16

Then Paul goes onto the event where that grace was shown and from which peace flows – the death of Jesus on the cross.

### **Jesus died for our sins**

Jesus died for our sins. The New Testament teaches that Christ's death was a sin offering which allowed our sins to be forgiven and put away. Is that where your righteousness comes from? Or are you striving to be good enough to earn your acceptance with God? Quite frankly, none of us appears to be trying as hard as Paul must have done as an earnest Pharisee and he gave it up for something better when it was offered to him.

### **Jesus died for our sins to rescue us from this present age**

This was a rescue mission. The Bible divides history into two ages – this present age and the age to come. The age to come is the Kingdom. It has come in Christ and yet has not fully come. It overlaps with the present age. Christ's death rescues us from the old age and transfers us into the age to come. The purpose of his death is to save us from our sins and that we might live a new life – the kingdom life.

### **According to the will of our God and Father**

This was the good and perfect will of the Father and of the Son. The Son gave himself. This was according to the will of the Father. Stott says, "We must never imply either that the Son volunteered to do something against the Father's will, or that the Father required the Son to do something against his own will."

I have heard that concern raised here. One lady told me that the cruel Father punished the innocent man Jesus to sort out this problem. But remember Jesus is God, the Father is God, the Spirit is God. On the cross, God the Son gave himself willingly to pay the price of sin so he might make peace with us.

David Pawson<sup>6</sup> tells of a visit the late Dr Sangster made to a dying woman in hospital.

He said to her, "Are you ready to meet God? What will you say when you meet him?"

She held up her worn hands and said, "I am a widow. I have brought up five children, so I have no time for church or the Bible or anything religious. But I have done my best for my children, and when I see God, I will hold up these hands, and he will look at them and he will understand."

Dr Sangster said to her, "You are too late, my dear, you are too late."

She said, "What do you mean?"

And he replied, "Well there is somebody who has got in front of you, and he is holding up his hands in front of God, and God has eyes for no other."

She said, "What do you mean?"

He told her, "Don't put your trust in your hands – put your trust in his hands."

Are you trusting in your own efforts or are you trusting in what Jesus has done? If you are not sure, don't neglect the matter. Come up after the service for prayer or discussion. Come to the next Alpha course which will take you through it carefully and slowly. Do press in to receive this wonderful gift which is offered to you.

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*® ©1972, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Societies. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

---

<sup>6</sup> Pawson D., 2003, *Unlocking the Bible*, HarperCollinsPublishers, London, p1000