

GOD'S TRUTH – The Gospel

The Bible is more than a guidebook; it is a living authority, shaping our preaching and teaching and making application to everyday life. It is through the Scripture that God changes the hearts of the unconvinced and matures those already in Christ. Therefore the Bible, not pragmatism, personalities, marketing techniques, or programs, drives and develops ministry.

Galatians 1.3-4 – Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Read Galatians 1.1-9

Context & Meaning

Paul makes clear in these verses what exactly the gospel of God is. The gospel is the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins in order to deliver from this present evil age. In short, the gospel is the grace of Jesus Christ. He gave up his life on the cross in obedience to the will of His Father so that his people would be forgiven of their sins and delivered from an age that is consumed with death. The gospel is the message that God's grace and peace has come *to us* at the expense of his Son, Jesus. (Theologians have called this **The Great Exchange** – Christ's life exchanged for my life. I give him all my sin, brokenness, guilt and shame – even my good deeds which are tainted with pride and self-righteousness and he gives me all of his love, forgiveness, faith and power).

Yet the startling thing about these verses is that the church in Galatia had begun to desert this message in order to go after that which was a false gospel, a gospel that in the end was devoid of grace and hope.

Apply

The gospel of God is always in danger of being deserted, of being 'traded in' for something else – something else that promises life but in the end can never come through. Some go for legalism, while others go for 'easy believism.' On the one hand, the legalist sees himself and the world as sinful, yet he insists the gospel is not enough. He must therefore seek to gain God's approval through his own moral effort. And in so doing, the legalist reduces the reality of sin to certain bad behaviors, rather than a condition of the heart. Ironically, the legalist is seen as having all the answers, yet often inwardly feels far from God, condemned, and joyless. On the other hand, the person who holds to 'easy believism' reduces the gospel to a simple decision where faith simply means acquiring 'fire insurance.' Both of these, legalism and 'easy believism,' down play the grace of God we so desperately need in order to be saved, ie. to have the abundant life that comes only in and through Jesus. Our calling as Christians is to be sure that we are continually clinging to the truth of the gospel, that we are keeping the truth of the gospel and its saving and transforming power before us rather than in the periphery.

For Reflection and Discussion – The Gospel (*Galatians 1.1-9*)

1. Do you see yourself exhibiting the tendencies of a legalist (trying to gain God's approval...reduces the reality of sin to certain 'bad' behaviors...has all the answers, etc...) or one who holds to 'easy believism' (reduces the gospel to a simple decision where faith is the means of acquiring 'fire insurance, i.e. the gospel simply saves you from hell)? What makes you think you have these tendencies? How have you sought to counter these tendencies?
2. What is humanity's greatest need? How does the gospel meet this? What implications does this have for your life (see Romans 3.9-20).
3. How have you based your life on the truth of the gospel, i.e. the way you relate to your spouse, your parenting, your relationships, your work, your sense of meaning and value as a human being etc...?
4. How would you define Paul's phrase 'this present age'? Do this in light of Galatians 5.19-21. How has, is and will Jesus deliver you from this?
5. How can we as a group stay committed to the centrality of the gospel? How can we help one another individually do this?