

‘Jesus’ Gospel.’ (1)

Before we begin I want to share with you some real laws which are still in force today here in the UK.

‘With the exception of carrots, most goods may not be sold on Sunday’.

‘It is illegal to be drunk on Licensed Premises’

‘A license is required to keep a lunatic.’

‘In York, excluding Sundays, it is perfectly legal to shoot a Scotsman with a bow and arrow.’

‘Any person found breaking a boiled egg at the sharp end will be sentenced to 24 hours in the village stocks’.

‘If a steam locomotive is driven on roads, a man must walk in front of the vehicle with a red flag during the day and a red lantern at night to warn passers-by.’

Now those laws believe or not, are still in force today, despite them being outdated and we all know we don’t need them enforced today. But the reason I shared them with you is because during the first century there were a bunch of Jews who were converted to Christianity called Judaizers. And they didn’t understand that Jesus had crucified the old laws and replaced them with new ones.

We’re beginning a new sermon series today and we’re going to work our way through Paul’s letter to the Galatian church. A letter which we know was written by Paul because he tells in **Galatians 1:1** “**Paul, an apostle**” and he writes in **Galatians 5:2** “**Mark my words! I, Paul.**” Very often Paul would get a secretary to write his letters for him but because of the seriousness of the Galatian problem, he sat down and personally wrote this letter.

Now we don’t know the exact date of the letter, some believe that the letter was written from Corinth between **A.D. 56 and 58 A.D.** while Paul was on his **third missionary journey**. And it was during this **third journey**, that Paul passed through southern Galatia “**strengthening all the disciples**” as **Acts 18:23** tells us. But if he did write the letter on his **third journey** when he was in Corinth, then we would understand that these disciples were about ten years in the faith and it had been only a year or so after Paul had taught in the area.

And loved ones, this is important for us to remember as we go through this letter. **Why?** Because it gives us an idea of how quickly apostasy to legal justification can set into a church, as well as, how persistent the teachers of such a doctrine can be. They were persistent and bold enough to walk right in behind the teaching of the apostle Paul on grace.

There is another consideration concerning the date of writing that might better enhance our understanding of the letter. Some people believe the letter was written in **48 A.D. or 49 A.D.**, or possibly immediately after the Jerusalem meeting in **Acts 15** when Paul received word concerning the great influence of the Judaizing teachers in the Galatian churches. If this is true, then the influence of legal justification entered the churches immediately after the establishment of the church in southern Galatia by Paul and Barnabas on Paul’s **first missionary journey**.

Now that might explain the unconverted character of those who came immediately out of legalistic Judaism into the fellowship of the church. This may also explain why Paul is so stern in this letter, for Judaizing teachers had come from Judea and were taking advantage of new-born babies in the Lord. Wolves had entered the flock before he could return to strengthen them in the faith. If the letter was written immediately after their conversion, then we can understand that what Paul is teaching in this letter, must be taught to new converts.

And so, the letter of Galatians is basically Paul’s defence of the very foundation upon which the church is based. It’s an urgent message to the early church because God knew that legalism would destroy the church in its very beginning.

Let me share with you a little historical background, the Greek name ‘**Galatia**’ refers to ‘**the land of the Gauls**’. The region is enclosed in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey. The area of Galatia was originally settled by the Gauls who broke away from the main tribal groups of the Gauls in central Europe around **278 B.C.** The Romans subdued the Gauls in **189 B.C.** and in **25 B.C.**, **Augustus**, Caesar of Rome, formed the area of Galatia into a Roman province. This meant that the Romans took over the principal positions of government and rule in the province.

At the time of **Antiochus, the Great**, many Jews had moved into the Galatian area. By the time of Paul's preaching, Judaism had really spread throughout the region and greatly influenced the culture. Paul preached in this area on his **first, second and third missionary journeys**. And Peter probably preached in this area after his stay in Antioch of Syria.

Now let me say this before we get into the text, all the way through this letter Paul is going to be dealing with the problem of legalism. And when it comes to the problem of legalism, Paul is going to get fighting mad. That's why he says in **Galatians 2:14** "How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" That's why he says in **Galatians 5:11+12** "Brothers and sisters, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been abolished. As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!"

Now loved ones, that's fighting talk and Paul is going to get fighting mad with these Jewish legalisers who were insisting that the Gentile Christians still need to observe the law and be circumcised. Paul is going to remind us that a Jesus plus anything gospel is not a Gospel at all. And if you're a legalist this morning, you're not going to enjoy this sermon series because Paul is going to challenge your thinking. And it's possible that you don't know if you're a legalist or not, well, if that's the case you won't be long in finding out.

Let's go ahead and discover what the problem was in the Galatian church. **Galatians 1:1+2** "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."

Straight away Paul reminds his readers of the authority he has as an apostle. Paul's first words are straight to the point and he's saying that his apostleship equals him in responsibility and authority with the original twelve apostles who were personally called by Jesus during His earthly ministry.

In fact, he's going to remind them again of this later in this same chapter. **Galatians 1:11+12** "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."

In other words, Paul had the same authority as the twelve because he was called and sent out personally by Jesus. Ok, he didn't have the qualifications of an apostle as we find it in **Acts 1:21+22** but he still fulfilled the qualification of being an apostle by the personal calling of Jesus.

Now remember to whom Paul was sent to, Paul was a Christ-sent apostle especially called for a mission to the Gentiles. **Acts 9:15** "But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel." Christ sent Paul specially to preach the Gospel to all men but especially to the Gentiles.

And Paul says, 'I'm an apostle, sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead'. You see, there were Christians in Galatia who were also claiming to have the authority of an apostle. And as we go through this letter we're going to see Paul defending his apostleship. We're only in **verse 1** of **Galatians 1** and Paul is already reminding them of who he is, and Whom he was sent by.

And in that very **first verse** he reminds them and us all of what is at the very heart of the Gospel message, **Jesus rose from the dead**. The very first Gospel message delivered to the Jews by Peter contained the heart of the Christian message. Peter says in **Acts 2:22-24** "Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." Paul reminds us that he preached the same Gospel message as Peter did and says it's really important to remember this message.

And what is the true Gospel message? **1 Corinthians 15:1-4** "Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures."

No matter how often we have heard the resurrection story, we need to hear it again. **As someone once said, ‘To the child it is wondrous because it is so new, to the grandparents it is wondrous because it is so old.’** We need to try and understand the importance of the Gospel message, it’s not just about the death and burial of Jesus, it’s about His resurrection. And Paul understood that without this resurrection, Christianity has no real foundation that would distinguish it from other religions of the world.

Galatians 1:3-5 “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”. After asserting his apostleship Paul now writes a common greeting where he desired that God’s blessing of salvation by grace would bring inward contentment. And because he’s about to deal with a legalistic problem, he’s gently reminding them that God’s grace brings peace between God and man. It’s by the grace of God that sin is forgiven and since there can be no peace between God and man as long as sin reigns in our lives, we’re all certainly in need of God’s grace.

There is also the sense that Paul is reminding these legalisers that grace or salvation can never be obtained by good works or by keeping the law. And that’s one of the main problems in trying work for your salvation by keeping certain laws. Salvation based on your own merit, never really brings peace of mind simply because you never know if you’ve done enough.

But for those who trust in the grace of God, they have peace of mind, **why?** Because they trust in God and not in themselves. They understand they can never do enough to earn their salvation, they understand that Jesus done more than enough for them at Calvary. That’s why Paul says that **‘the Lord Jesus Christ, gave himself’**. It was God’s eternal purpose and will, that Jesus be offered as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of men. **1 Timothy 1:15 “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.”**

Now this is a significant statement that Paul is beginning with here in the **Galatian letter** because this is what he’s going to build his argument upon against the legalisers. Paul is saying that all Christians are saved by the atonement of Jesus on the cross not by our meritorious deeds and works of law. And loved ones, this has always been God’s plan for mankind.

Ephesians 1:3-6 “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love, he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will—to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.”

Those words **‘rescue us’** in **Galatians 1:4** is the Greek word, **‘exaireo’** and it means to actively tear out. And so, what Paul is saying is, because of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Christians are torn out by obedient faith from this dark, wicked world in which we live. **And who do we give the glory to?** All glory must go to God, the Father. The glory doesn’t go to the church or the preacher, the church and the preacher must give all the glory to God.

Too many times I’ve heard Christians boasting about the things they do or the things they’ve done or how great they are. But Paul warns us in **Ephesians 2:8+9 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”**

In fact, Paul is going to deal with this kind of boasting a little later in **Galatian 6**. **Galatians 6:13 “Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh.”**

I read a story the other day about an eight-year-old named Christopher Haynes from Peterborough, England. Christopher threw a bottle into the sea at Sheringham with a message inside asking for a pen pal. Well after a few weeks he received a reply from a Dutch citizen who found the bottle on the beach at Zandvoort, the Netherlands. And what was written on the message? ‘Christopher, never throw rubbish in the sea again.’

Legalism promotes self-righteousness but for those of us who understand that we’re saved by grace, we will always give the glory to God for saving us.

In **Luke 18** when Jesus shares the parable of the two men who went to the temple to pray, one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee was full of himself and the tax collector couldn't even bring himself to look up towards heaven. Jesus tells us in **Luke 18:4** "I tell you that this tax collector, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." All the glory must go to God for His tremendous gift of grace through the cross of Jesus. **2 Corinthians 9:15** "Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!"

You see the legalist will always see the worst in other people, especially among their own brethren. Oh, they're happy you're reading the Bible but they're not happy you're not using the **King James Version**. Oh, they're happy you're singing songs of praise to God but they're not happy you're using an overhead projector instead of a book. They're happy you remember the Lord during the Supper but they're not happy you're using multiple cups.

The great Bible teacher, **H. Clay Trumbull** was riding on a train next to a person who opened a flask and offered him a drink of whiskey. **Dr. Trumbull** declined the offer. A few minutes later the man repeated the offer, and again **Dr. Trumbull** turned him down. The third time the offer was made, the man said to **Dr. Trumbull**, 'I bet you think I'm a rather evil man doing all this drinking, don't you?' 'No,' said **Dr. Trumbull**. 'I was thinking what a generous man you are to keep offering me a drink.' And the amazing thing about this story is that by the time they got to their destination **Dr. Trumbull** actually helped that man to come to Christ.

Loved ones, Paul gets fighting mad when Christians demand they're right before God based upon the things that they do or the things they don't do. We need to be on our guard against anyone preaches a Jesus plus Gospel.

Let me ask you, are you trying to get right or keep right with God to get to heaven based upon the things, you do or don't do? Let me ask that question this way, why do you do the things you do? What motivates you to do the things you're doing?

For example, why do you come to worship? Why do you study the Bible? Why do you do good deeds? Is it because you want to or because you feel you have to? You see loved ones, a Jesus plus Gospel says, 'you have to come to worship', 'you have to study the Bible', or 'you have to do good deeds'. A Jesus plus Gospel puts demands in place where God has put no such demands. A Jesus plus Gospel demands that we change our lives, our thinking, or our attitude. And so, it comes up with a bunch of rules and regulations to make sure you keep in line with the other legalists.

You see, legalism says God will love us if we change but the Gospel says God will change us because He loves us. The power to change isn't within ourselves, it's in the Gospel. We worship God because we want to, we study His word because we want to, and we do good deeds because we want to. And the reason we want to is because of Christ's coming into this world to die for each of us and give us the hope of eternal life with Him in heaven. Rules and regulations can change people on the outside and force them to do certain things or stay away from certain things but rules and regulations can't change people's heart.

Ezekiel 36:26+27 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws."

How does God change our hearts today? **Ephesians 1:18-23** "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."

Paul says that God draws us into circumstances that require us to relate to Him through faith, trust, and complete dependence on Him. This ever-increasing state of faith, trust, and dependence comes from our hearts. By trusting in and depending on God, and not trusting in the limited, temporal resources of the world, others, or myself, we shed the old dead skin of our sinful nature. This shedding process allows Christ to renew our minds through the increased presence of His Spirit who we are making room for in our hearts of trust and dependence.

In other words, we choose to live the way God wants us to live. We choose to come and worship Him as He asks of us, we choose to study His word because we know we'll draw closer to Him. We chose to do good deeds because that's what Jesus did and we know that God gets pleasure when we do these things.

1 John 4:15-19 "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so, we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world, we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us."

Loved ones you can't buy your way into heaven as **Led Zeppelin** once sang, no matter how much money you give to charity, no matter how many charitable deeds you do. Just before Jesus' final breath on the cross, His dying words recorded in **John 19:30** were, "**It is finished.**" Everything to do with your sins were dealt with at the cross.

And so now all who believe in Jesus and trust in what He did at calvary for us will do everything God asks of us. Not because we have too but because we're motivated by His love for us to do so. If you're willing to trust in Jesus and what He did for all of us, then please don't leave here today without asking someone what you need to do to be right with God.