

Often during a news programme the presenter will give a warning that the next report contains flash photograph or disturbing images. As we beginning looking at Paul's letter to the Galatians I want to issue a warning that this letter contains strong language and it does so because this letter deals with matters of life and death!

What we are about over these Sunday sermons taking us through the autumn is not an esoteric exercise. Paul wrote this letter because he was concerned about the spiritual well being of these Christians and it is part of the Bible relevant to us today for the same reason. It is a matter of life and death and therefore worthy of our attention.

I was on the M25 about 10 days ago and needless to say there was a traffic jam, fortunately for me on the other side of the road. As I travelled along I saw at least three vehicles with blue lights flashing struggling to get through the traffic to whatever had caused the hold up. They were desperate to get through because it was a matter of life and death.

Having written this letter I can almost see the Apostle Paul telling the messenger who would deliver it to get it to the churches asap because it was a matter of life and death.

So I hope whether you are here in Christ Church or listening on download I hope you will listen and note what Paul has to say as being vital that is a matter of life over death.

So what was the problem that caused Paul to write with such urgency and in such strong language?

### **1. The problem v6-10**

As we see from v2 Paul was writing the to the Christians in Galatia by which I think he is referring to the area round Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe which he visited with the gospel on his first missionary journey.

Having made the introductions in vs 1-5 Paul, rather than either pray for these Christians or thank God for them as he did in other letters, jumps right into the problem that caused him to write to them, v6-7.

Some teachers had pitched up in the churches there and were presenting a different gospel. As a result they were causing confusion amongst the Christians and the result was that some were turning away from the gospel.

It was Sunday evening in the days when people had butlers. The master said to his butler, "I will have bacon and eggs for breakfast tomorrow." Well you can imagine he wasn't best pleased to come down in the morning and find a boiled egg. He asked what was going on and the butler told him he wasn't sure the bacon was fresh and anyway the Master would be better off with just a boiled egg. That night the master repeated his request for bacon and eggs. Next day he came down and there was bacon and eggs but also sausages, mushrooms, tomatoes and so on. So he took the butler to

task, “look” the master said, “I asked for bacon and eggs not all this!” The butler protested “but I thought it would be better.”

Once more the instructions were repeated, “tomorrow for breakfast I want bacon and eggs.” So the next day the Master came down to breakfast rubbing his hands looking forward to bacon and eggs. He lifted the lid off his breakfast plate to find a kipper. When asked why the butler said, “ah well they were fresh in at the market and I know you are partial to a kipper.” “But,” replied the master “I wanted bacon and eggs!”

The problem in the Galatian churches, as Paul saw it, was that the teachers who had come in were teaching that if these Christians really wanted salvation then what Jesus had done was a good start but they needed also to obey the Jewish law, the law of Moses. They needed to be circumcised and to follow the ritual laws.

In that sense they were a bit like that butler and were saying to the Christians there you don’t just want bacon and eggs you want a whole lot more. In so doing they were not giving them the gospel but something different.

However, as Paul pointed out, there is no such thing as a different gospel. A kipper is not bacon and eggs. So because these teachers were offering something different than the gospel they were putting people’s spiritual lives at risk. These Christians had been turned away from the gospel and were, as we shall see more in weeks ahead, trusting something else for their salvation. That was why Paul was astonished. No sooner had they heard the gospel from him and believed it than they were turning away from it to something else.

This was serious and hence the strong language v8 and v9 “let him be eternally condemned” the word used is anathema!

The problem was serious and so it caused Paul to write with urgency and with such strong language. Language he realised as we see in v10 that would not gain him popularity. But then if you see someone about to run into danger you don’t tend to say “oh I say chap that doesn’t look like a good idea” do you? Instead you shout “stop!”

Paul’s message through the whole of the letter is that there is only one gospel, one message of salvation and it must not be changed or adapted.

But why is that so? Why as it were just bacon and eggs why can’t we add a few bits? Why can’t we as it were have kippers instead?

## **2. The gospel v3-5**

So what was the gospel that Paul was keen to protect and why was he keen to protect it?

The days are gone now it seems where people used to write letters. Most communication is electronic. So when the postman does come it is usually circulars, mail shots and the like. If you are

anything like me you sift the mail and just occasionally see a letter or card and that is the first thing you look at and especially if you recognise the hand writing and it is a family member. The letter from a child or from a parent is valuable to us.

Why did Paul want to protect this gospel because he knew from whom it had come.

**a. it was from God v3,**

“Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”.

The words grace and peace here as we will see in a moment refer to the gospel and Paul knew that the gospel had its origin in God and as such was incredibly valuable. The message was not, as we will see with Tim next week, a man made story.

I am hoping later in the term to run the Lost for words course again. This is a great opportunity to think through how we share our faith and with whom. At the centre of it is the opportunity to clarify our story, that is how the gospel has affected our lives but also we look at what we call “God’s story” that is what God has done in Jesus. The gospel is God’s story, the message from God about our salvation and as such it is of great importance and because it comes from God it is not for us humans to change.

Paul was keen to hold onto and protect the gospel because it came from God and

**b. it is centred on the death of Jesus v4**

here we have the heart of the gospel Jesus “gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father.”

Jesus gave himself for our sins. He was as it were the offering for sin which acts to remove our guilt.

The point Paul will make in the letter is that there is no way we humans can make ourselves right with God. Because of sin, which is our rebellion against God and his right to be God in our lives, there is no way we can be acceptable to God, no way we can be “righteous”. However what we cannot do has been done for us in Jesus. He died and his death is seen by a holy God as sufficient to pay for our sins, to remove the sin, the guilt and restore us holy and righteous as children of God. His death and his death alone can do this. He gave himself for our sins. That is the heart of the gospel that Jesus died in my place that I might be forgiven for my sin and restored to God.

But more, through his death, we are rescued from the present evil age. This is what God the Father has done in Jesus he has rescued us. Had he not done so then we would, as part of this rebellious world, have been destined for wrath and judgement. However in Jesus we have been rescued and now our life is safe with God and all this through Jesus.

Paul was keen to hold onto and protect the gospel because it came from God, is centred upon the death of Jesus and

**c. It results in grace and peace.**

Jesus died as we see in v4 according to the will of our God and Father and that is part of the grace of God. God the father sent God the son into this evil age so that he might give up his life to rescue us humans from our sin and the inevitable consequences of that sin. That is grace the free unmerited gift of God to all who will receive it. It results in peace that is through the gospel we have peace with God. We who through sin are his enemies, through the death of Jesus become his friends. This is the work of grace through the gospel.

It was this gospel that Paul was keen to protect. He was keen to do this because in trying to change the gospel by adding things to it these teachers were putting people's salvation at risk.

Paul had brought the gospel to these people a gospel of salvation through Christ alone by faith alone but others were seeking to add to that obedience to the law. Paul was saying no you cannot do that because there is no other gospel and if you change the one gospel you no longer have the gospel of salvation but something very different. You don't have bacon and eggs but a kipper – it is not the same, not even close!

Those who have done Christianity Explained or Explored with me will be familiar with a couple of questions that are asked during the course.

The first is the question "Do you know for certain that you have eternal life? That is if you were to die now that you would go to heaven?"

It is an important question and is a big part of why Paul wrote this letter because he wanted these Christians and others down the years to know that their eternal future was secure.

The second question leads on from it "Suppose you were to die tonight and you stood before God in heaven and he asked, "Why should I let you into my heaven", what would you say?"

It is in the answer to that question that there was a big divide between Paul and the teachers in the Galatian churches. Paul's answer was "because Jesus died for my sins". The answer from the teachers was along the lines of well Jesus died but I have also tried to keep the law.

It was that latter part which Paul asserts would deny these Christians any certainty in response to the first question.

Friends Paul writes this letter to make it clear to these Christians and to us that there is only one gospel, one message of God's salvation. It is a gospel which declares to all that Christ died for our sins and that is all we need for our salvation. We can do nothing to earn our salvation we simply trust in what Jesus has done for us.

Do you know for certain that if you were to die now that you would go to heaven?

If you were to die and God were to ask why should I let you into my heaven what would you say?

May your answer be because of Jesus and only because of Jesus.

But before we finish one last question and that is who was Paul to assert all this?

### **3. Paul an apostle v1-2**

We will meet this point several times over the weeks in that the reason Paul spoke so passionately was because as we see in v1 he was an Apostle and an Apostle sent by Jesus and God the Father. His task was God given as his message was God given and therefore they and we should listen to it.

These other teachers were obviously suggesting that Paul wasn't a real apostle and his message was something he made up. But here, and elsewhere in the letter, he affirms the opposite that he was an Apostle because he was called and appointed by God and his message was from God and as such to heard and accepted by all.

We live in a world where we are taught to be suspicious of people and of any authority they claim. I was listening to the radio in the week and hearing that there is now another scam whereby people are trying to get access to people's bank accounts either by phone calls or even sending a messenger to ask for your bank card. We rightly ask by what authority?

So here is Paul who said to these Galatian Christians listen to me and we ask by what authority? Paul replies by God's authority, who called me to be an apostle and gave me the message of salvation.

Paul says I speak from God and for God. If that is so then we are not in a position to say as some do "I agree with Paul on this but I disagree with him on that". No instead we say this is God's word through Paul and we must listen, accept and obey his word.

What does God say through Paul for us to listen to, accept and obey?

He says that there is only one gospel. It is the message from God that there is salvation only in Jesus Christ. We must trust that gospel for our own salvation and we must hold out that gospel unchanged to others that they too may be saved.