

Paul's clear statement to the Christians in Rome was "I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes; first for the Jew, then for the Gentile." (Romans 1:16)

It is this thought which dominates this letter of Paul's to the church in Galatia.

Let's just refresh.

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. He had a specific issue that he was writing about and it was that 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. In addition they were suggesting that Paul wasn't really an apostle and his message didn't match that of Peter and the other apostles.

Today we see how Paul took that gospel to the apostles and as it were got it endorsed, in so doing established the gospel as one message for the salvation of all people, both Jew and Gentile. To do that he had to make

### **1. A journey to Jerusalem v1-3**

I can remember doing a sight seeing tour round Jerusalem but that was not Paul's purpose. After many years out in the mission field preaching the gospel he went to Jerusalem with two of his co-workers, Barnabas who was a Christian from a Jewish background and Titus who was a Christian from a gentile background. He went to meet Peter James and John and probably other apostles. Paul went to sort out the issue that was at stake, "I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles." (V2)

I was listening to a radio programme recently where they were discussing neighbourly disputes and the fact that people had put notes through neighbours doors complaining of all sorts of things from putting bins out wrongly to parking badly. People were saying, if there was a problem why not go and talk to the person about it?

Disputes – we all have them be it with neighbours or friends or family or in the church.

I wonder how do you deal with disputes? I have to confess I hate confrontation and will do almost anything to avoid it if I can. But here Paul fronted it up. As we see in v2 he went to talk to the apostles but he did it in private. That surely has to be the way to do it.

But what we are seeing again here is the importance of the gospel to Paul. So important was it to him that he was willing to stop his work, to travel with two others probably from Antioch in Syria to Jerusalem unsure of what kind of reception he would get and meet up with Peter and others.

He did it because he felt he was

## 2. Fighting for the truth v4-5

Why did he feel that was necessary? A number of reasons are there in the passage but they all boil down to one thing.

**a. the “false brothers” v4.** These are mentioned in 1:7 as those who were throwing the Christians in Galatia into confusion and are here described as “making us slaves”. Their message as we saw before was that it is ok to believe in Jesus death but if people would be fully saved they needed to obey the law of Moses and especially they need to be circumcised, hence the mention of Titus in v3. This was as Paul put it in 1:6 “a different gospel which is no gospel”. However they were claiming that Peter and others were endorsing their message and so denying Paul’s.

This led to a second reason why Paul took this journey and that was

**b. out of fear, v2.** If we look back to v2 “for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain”. He was concerned that those who were preaching against him and causing confusion would turn people away from the truth of the gospel and so away from salvation and Paul would have laboured in vain. But all of this comes down to the one main reason which I set out at the start

**c. to fight for the gospel v5.** “We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you”.

This is the one thing it all boiled down to. What Paul saw was at stake here was the very message of salvation and with that people’s salvation.

Paul was concerned that these relatively new Christians in Galatia were putting their trust for their salvation in the right place and that was in the gospel message that Jesus Christ the Son of God died as a sacrifice sufficient to deal with the sin of each and every person who will accept it.

I hear this week a certain football manager referring to himself as like a mother hen looking after the eggs that they might hatch and flourish. Here Paul is more like a gardener watching over these tender shoots and doing all he can to protect them that they might grow and bear fruit. To do that it was necessary that they were basing their hope of salvation in the right place and that was in what Jesus had done not in what they I through obeying the law. I hope we are all clear on that. Your salvation and my salvation depends solely on accepting by faith what Jesus did for us on the cross. Paul met with these other apostles and fought for the gospel.

Through this meeting what we see is

## 3. The gospel secured v6-10

The first five verses are full of what Paul did with the emphasis on the “I” and “we”. Now we see the response of the apostles who were in Jerusalem with the emphasis on “they” and “those”.

What was their response to Paul setting out his gospel, the message of salvation he had been spreading round the Mediterranean?

**a. v6 “they added nothing”.** Paul’s message was seen as kosher and I use the word advisedly. No sausage or fried bread was added to the bacon and eggs. If you’re not sure what I mean listen to the first sermon in the series. In this small phrase we see that these men who were held up by the “false brothers” as the true apostles accepted what Paul was teaching and had been doing. He had not laboured in vain.

**b. v7 they saw** that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles. It wasn’t just the message they endorsed but Paul’s whole ministry.

c. v9 “James, Peter and John, those reputed to be the pillars, gave me and Barnabas **the right hand of fellowship** when they recognized the grace given to me.” They shared the sign of Christian unity with Paul.

**d. V9 “They agreed** that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.” They recognised they had different areas of gospel ministry.

**e. v10 “All they asked** was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” The apostles were keen that Paul and others should not forget the poor church in Jerusalem and share in unity in helping them.

In all this we see that Paul as an apostle and his message of salvation through the death of Jesus alone was endorsed and so secured for the whole church for all time.

But you may well be sitting there thinking

#### **4. Does it matter?**

You may be saying “Ilan if I don’t read the minutes of our Church Council or of the Diocesan Synod then why make me read the notes from an Evangelism group meeting that took place in Jerusalem even before you were born!!!”

I do it because this is part of the Bible and all the Bible is there for our learning. However I do it because in our day as in every age we need to learn the lessons that are here.

**a. the gospel matters.** The integrity of the gospel message was clearly important to Paul and we will see this again in future weeks. Paul’s message was that we are saved through what God has done for us and not our own efforts. By altering that message the “false brothers” were putting people’s eternal future at risk. When the means of salvation comes under attack then we must stand and defend the gospel. In the church we will have lots of differences of opinions over baptism, over predestination and so on and we can agree to disagree and continue in fellowship and unity. But over the gospel we cannot. If, as we quoted from Paul at the beginning, the gospel is the power of God to salvation then we must hold that gospel precious, we must not alter it, rather we must defend its integrity. In regards to this we must recognise that the greatest threat will come as it had in Galatia from those within the church. We must be vigilant as we listen to what Christian leaders

say and we must be bold when they alter the gospel or offer something other than the gospel as a means of salvation. It matters because people's eternal futures are at stake.

**b. there is only one gospel.** The danger at this point was that there would be a division between Peter and Paul and that some would say this is Peter's gospel and that is Paul's. This meeting meant that the gospel was secured as one gospel which has been passed on down the church through the ages. The gospel we preach, the gospel we believe was preached by Paul and Peter and it written clear in the Bible and it is the gospel of salvation.

**c. we will present that gospel in different ways.** That is what is meant when Paul said he would take the gospel to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews. One gospel but presented by two men both steeped in their Jewish background but speaking to different people according to the culture and background of the listeners. It would be difficult to reach the Jews if an evangelist showed a complete indifference to their religious laws. It was equally hard to reach the Gentiles if he imposed those same rules on them. In other words we need to make our evangelism culturally sensitive. The gospel must never be compromised, but the way in which we present it will vary enormously. Paul will present the gospel in one way because he is speaking to a Gentile audience; Peter will present it to Jews in a different way – the same gospel, but maybe in different clothes. As we share the gospel we need to be sensitive to the culture and background of those listening and speak accordingly. However it is when the cultural baggage such as circumcision here in Galatia becomes part of the gospel that we have problems.

Friends as we have been recognising especially over the last 12 months we are called to share the gospel, the good news of what God the Father has done for us in God the son, with those around us, our contact people. We recognise, as we saw at the beginning, that the gospel is God's power for salvation and he uses it to bring people to faith. The gospel is God's gospel and we are called to share it but not to alter it, not to adapt it, not to smother it in a cultural cloak so the gospel becomes unclear.

I am here today because someone shared that gospel with me and I'm sure many others of us could testify the same. May it be that, unless Jesus returns, in 30 years time there are people here saying I am here because someone in the congregation of Christ Church shared the gospel with me and through that I came to faith.

Paul stood up for the gospel so that as he says in v5 "the truth of the gospel might remain with you".

It does but having that gospel let us maintain it and pass it on.