

The Divine Gospel Source

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[0 : 00] All right, so we're at week number two of 10 in Galatians as we start this new series. We started it last week and we'll continue through with this over 10 weeks and travel along with it in our community groups as well.

And we're at Galatians chapter 1 verse 10 through 24. If you've got a Bible, keep it open and we'll do this thing together. So yesterday I had the great privilege of conducting a Thanksgiving service for a little baby.

It's the first time I'd ever done something like that and the family wasn't a church family. They'd just sort of lived around the area for a while and they wanted to have this service, this naming Thanksgiving service for their kid.

And so it was cool. We were in the old church and they had about 50 people turn up, none of whom were church going people, not believers for as much as I know. And it was great.

I got to kind of thank God for these children, the provision of that child. I got to hold the baby, which I've loved doing ever since I was a little kid.

[1 : 06] I actually held onto it for longer than I should have, but they're okay with it. And I also got to preach the gospel. And that was kind of the main thing for me was just being able to stand up and talk about Jesus with all these people who aren't Christians.

And it was cool. I also got invited back to the family home afterwards. I got food, which is just one of the greatest kickbacks in my job is the amount of food you get. And in addition to that, I got to talk to a bunch of people about the message that I preached.

And there was one guy in particular, really lovely guy down from Queensland. He ended up inviting Renee and myself up there to stay with him at any point that we were up there. Just a really lovely guy.

In his words, a lapsed Catholic. And so we got to talking about what I'd said. And I asked him, what do you think about what I said about Jesus? About him being Lord and Savior and Creator and all of that.

And he said, I just love the message. And I really like the religion of today because the religion of today acknowledges that the top four religions are really all the same.

[2 : 18] And they've all got the same gods. And, you know, you pray and worship the same gods. And at that point, I had a decision to make, didn't I? Like this guy was a really nice guy.

I was on kind of foreign territory. I really wanted to befriend him as much as I could. I knew that I probably wouldn't see him again.

So it was an easy out for me if I didn't want to stand up for what we believe about Jesus Christ. And there was something within me, being part of the generation that I'm part of, that just wanted to let it go.

But by God's grace, I didn't. And I actually said to him, well, you know, that's actually not true. That's not what we believe about Jesus Christ. We believe from his own words that he is the way, the truth and the life.

That no one comes to the Father but through him. That he is necessarily, by his own words, exclusive. And above all other gods. And in fact, other gods are false gods that we ought to reject.

[3 : 25] What do you think about that? And he said, I understand what you're saying. And I understand that it's true for you.

But that's not what my experience has led me to believe. Now, isn't that, doesn't that just encapsulate the philosophy of today when it comes to truth?

Even if truth is incompatible, it's still acceptable. What's true for you may not be true for me.

But that's okay. And it got me thinking a lot about truth this week. And it's really the milieu we live in.

I know that you guys don't live in a Christian bubble. I know that you have friends at university at work who aren't Christians. And I know that you come across this all the time. This relative understanding of truth.

[4 : 32] And so if I can just take a minute just to maybe explain how we got here. How we got to this understanding of truth which is pervasive. That truth is portable and relative.

And it really happened about 500 years ago. It started to happen in the last 150 years. The pace really quickened and we've ended up where we are today. So in the last 150 years, some of the big influences on our understanding of who we are and of what truth is.

One of them is Marxism. So Marxism says that who you are, what you believe is very much influenced almost entirely by economics. So the economic situation you grew up in, the economic temperature around you determines what you believe about this or that thing.

Determines where you are and how you interpret truth. And then in addition to Marxism, we've got Freudianism. If you're a little bit crazy, you'll love Freud. He's a pretty weird guy but nonetheless has a great following.

And Freudianism says that who you are, what you believe is largely determined by your repressed sexuality. So your repressed sexual desires for this person or that person determines really what you believe and how you behave in the world.

[5 : 53] And then you've got behavioral psychology as well which says kind of generally that who you are, what you believe, how you behave is determined by outside impulses.

So whatever comes into your world, what stimuli comes into your world, how you were brought up or whatever determines who you are, what you believe. Whether you love your dad, whether you hate your dad, whether you love your country or hate your country, that is all determined by outside stimuli.

And all of that really has led to a point today where we determine truth based on our experience. And so truth is necessarily relative to our experience.

There is no absolute truth. There is no one way of seeing things. There is no exclusivity allowed. The greatest, the most intolerant thing, actually, what am I trying to say?

The thing that people are most intolerant of is intolerance. Just think about that. You get on the way home and you'll chuckle to yourself because it's ridiculous. All right.

[7 : 02] But that's where we are. And the Bible is going to butt heads with that understanding of truth. The Bible has no space for relative understandings of truth. And Paul, in particular in Galatians, is not going to stand for it.

We saw this last week. If you remember, I think it was verse 8 of chapter 1. He says that, let's have a look at it. Verse 8 of chapter 1. Basically, just to give you a little bit of background, in Galatia, Paul has planted the church around 46, 47 AD.

Planted the church there on one of his missionary journeys. And now it's about 48 AD, a year later. And they have completely stuffed up their faith. There have been a bunch of guys who have come in who we call the Judaizers.

And they've come in. They were Jews who became Christians, sort of. But they believe that in addition to faith in Christ, you need to be circumcised. You need to obey these certain works of the law.

So, it's not just faith by grace, but by works as well. And so, they've come into the church in Galatia and they've started to lead Paul's church astray by telling them this stuff.

[8 : 11] Now, listen. Paul says about those guys, verse 8. He says that even if we, that is apostles and teachers, even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaim to you, let that one be accursed.

What Paul is saying there is if anyone comes to you with another gospel, another truth, that's not just a matter of indifference. It's not just a little thing for us to overlook.

That is a matter of heaven and hell. The people who present other gospels are really writing their own ticket to hell. There is no two ways about it.

There is no two gospels. There's the one gospel handed down by Jesus to the apostles and to us through the scriptures. Because that's it. And he's going to go back there tonight.

And so, we see also tonight that in this reading that the real beef that these guys, these Judaizers have with Paul is that they're saying that he's not a real apostle.

[9 : 20] They're saying they sort of made the B team for the apostles. He sort of came along a little bit late. He wasn't as fast. He wasn't as good a, you know, a kick or a shooter. He sort of made it to the bench.

He's one of those apostles. And in addition to that, he's sort of gone a little bit far. He's taking this liberty thing too far. Saying that grace is, that the gospel is about grace and not works.

He's gone over the edge. They're saying, no, you still need to be circumcised. You still need to obey the law. And that way you can be right with God. And so, that's their two big problems with Paul.

He's not a real apostle. He just sort of tagged along with them. And also, he's gone too far with this liberty stuff. So, let's take a look at it. We're going Galatians.

I'm going to read 10 to 12. Paul says to his church, What he's saying here is, gospel truth isn't open to human interpretation based on our relative experience.

[10 : 50] You can't come to the gospel and say, well, I've experienced this. So, this is how I'm going to read the Bible. This is how I'm going to interpret the Bible. This is how I'm going to sift through and choose the bits that I like. There's one gospel, he says.

And there's one gospel source. And it's not from men. It's from God alone. And that's why he says, verse 11, The gospel proclaimed by me is not of human origin. It's not from human source.

But I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. And here's what Paul is saying. We don't interpret the gospel. The gospel interprets us.

It's not like this. You don't put the Bible on the ground and stand over it and say, this is how I'm going to read the Bible based on my experience, based on my knowledge, based on my stupid uni degree, based on my philosophy teacher who told me this.

You don't do that. You get the Bible and you put it above your head and it interprets you. It tells you who you are. It tells you what humanity is like. That's how we read the Bible.

[11:56] The gospel, there is one gospel. He says it in verse, I think it's six or seven. Verse seven. Remember from last week he said, verse six and seven.

He says, I'm astonished that you're so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel. Verse seven. Not that there is a different gospel. Not that there is another gospel.

There is one gospel and there's one source and that's from God alone. So don't mess with the gospel is what he's trying to say. And this is where I just find it so irritating, the hypocrisy of liberal Christianity.

Like not that that even exists. I mean, there's no such thing as a liberal Christian. There's Christians and then those guys who don't want to accept what the Bible says, all right? But liberal Christianity says this.

These are my degrees. These are my experiences. This is how I want to view the world. Now I'm going to read the Bible and I'll take the bits that agree with my presuppositions and the rest I'll reject.

[13:00] That's liberal faux Christianity. That's not how we come to the Bible. The Bible is God breathed, profitable for correction, exhortation, training and righteousness.

That's how we come to the gospel. And that's what Paul is exhorting the Galatians to do. Remember the one true gospel that he passed on to them. Now Paul could have let it slide, couldn't he?

I mean, he could have thought, well, I planted the church. Most of them are going to stay with me. These guys, these Judaizers, they're calling themselves Christians.

They're adding a few things to the gospel about circumcision and other stuff. But, you know, maybe I should just let that slide. But he doesn't. He knows the gospel isn't up for grabs.

Truth isn't relative. There is one gospel, one truth. And so he hits them pretty hard with this. And then from there we go on to a lengthy description of his conversion.

[14:07] So what I'm going to do, we'll eventually read this section together. But what I thought might be helpful, Matt, maybe if you can come up with Acts 9.

And this is the account by Luke of Paul or Saul, who was later Paul, of Saul's conversion. Okay, so we're going to hear this. I just want you to listen really carefully and tune in to Matt's voice.

Maybe close your eyes if you need to. Imagine what you're hearing about this man, Paul, who's writing this letter. And then we'll go to his own version of the events for the Galatians.

All right? Thanks, Matt. So that's Acts 9, starting at verse 1. Meanwhile, Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priests and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

Now, as he was going along and approaching at Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?

[15:16] He asked, Who are you, Lord? The reply came, I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.

The men who were traveling with him stood speechless because they heard the voice but saw no one. Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing.

So they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. For three days he was without sight and neither ate nor drank. Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias.

The Lord said to him in a vision, Ananias. He answered, Here I am, Lord. The Lord said to him, Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.

At this moment he was praying, and he was seen in a vision. A man named Ananias came in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight. But Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem.

[16:27] And there and here he has authority from the chief priest to bind all who invoke your name. But the Lord said to him, Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name from Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.

I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name. So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized. And taking some food, he regained his strength.

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus. And immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogue, saying, He is the Son of God. All right, so that's Luke's account of Saul's conversion.

It's an incredible conversion story of God's grace just breaking into this man's life and changing him, going from the killer of Christians to someone who was willing to be killed for being a Christian.

[17:46] And now we're going to see his own account of this, the way that he wants to tell it in order for the Galatians to benefit from it. I think we're going to see three reasons why he does it, three benefits that we can gain from hearing this.

So it's a lot of reading, but I want you to stick with me for this. Let's go to verse 13. He says, You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism.

I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it. I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors.

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me.

But I went away at once into Arabia and afterwards I returned to Damascus. Then after three years I did go up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days.

[18:57] But I did not see any other apostle except James, the Lord's brother. In what I am writing to you before God, I do not lie. Then I went into the regions of Syria and Sicilia, and I was still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ.

They only heard it said, It's an incredible story, isn't it?

Does it give you hope when you've got friends, relatives who aren't Christians and you just think they're way out of God's grasp? Are they killing Christians and imprisoning them? Probably not. Are they at the absolute pinnacle of another religion?

Probably not. And yet God broke into the life of Saul and continues to do so. That's an aside. I want to do three reasons that we should be encouraged. Three reasons I think that Paul wanted to share his story with the Galatians.

First of all, I think he did it to show that his detractors are completely wrong about him. His opponents, these Judaizers, they've got it wrong. They're saying that he's not a real apostle, that he just tagged along with the other apostles and then sort of branched off from them and went his own way.

[20 : 10] He's saying, no, no, no. I haven't even, up until three years after I started planning churches, I'd never met an apostle. I didn't receive this from the apostles. I received this from Jesus Christ himself.

And we just heard how that happened on the road to Damascus. And they've also been saying, obviously, that he's got the wrong gospel. But again, he wants to say, if this was man's gospel, you could accuse me of being wrong.

It could just be my interpretation. It would just be my truth. But no, this is the gospel handed on to me by Jesus Christ himself. We can be absolutely confident in this word, that it's the word of God himself.

It's not made up by human creativity or the want for human power and control, but it's actually the word of God to us. Number two, I reckon he's sharing his testimony because it proves God's grace.

Remember the Judaizers, these opponents of him, they want to say that faith is not by grace alone. It's kind of a little bit of grace. And then, well, if you're a man, you can get circumcised.

[21 : 19] That'll get you more in God's favor. Then you can obey the works of the law and that'll get you into heaven. But he's saying, no, no, look what happened to me. I did no good works. I prayed no committal prayer asking Jesus into my heart.

He just appeared to me on the road, struck me down and made me a Christian. That's how God's grace manifests itself in your life.

God takes the initiative. It's pure grace. And so that's an encouragement both to the Galatians and to us. And I think also, I just want to stretch this point a bit.

I think it speaks to us and contradicts our modern understanding of truth and about who we are. Remember how I said Marxism says we're like this because of this and Freudianism says we're like this because of this and kind of behavioral psychology says we are bound to be like this because of these impulses in our life.

And I want to encourage us just by saying that that is not the case. It does not have to be the case that you are owned by your past. It does not have to be the case that you're owned by your circumstances.

[22 : 30] God's grace can save you from yourself. And God's grace enables you to trust in the word of God in the midst of terrible circumstances in your life.

If you believed human or secular philosophy, then you would have to resign yourself to your circumstances. But you don't have to.

And I might give you a couple of examples about this by way of encouragement and also by way of rebuke if you're on the wrong side of this. But how about this?

If we're slaves to our circumstances, then I would be very, very afraid for my sweet little wife Renee. Because Renee's a paramedic, right? And I saw when we first got married, that's when she went into the job four years ago, coming up in a couple of weeks.

And I saw that she went very quickly from being a sweet, happy, delightful, joyful girl very, very quickly starting to fall into cynicism and doubt.

[23 : 38] And Renee would come home from, granted, from horrific, seeing horrific things. And she would say to me things like, how can we trust in a loving God?

You know, this family, we worship this God who we say is sovereign and good. How can we do that in the midst of the circumstances that I've seen today?

And like yesterday, she calls me up and she'd just been to a car accident. And she turns up and the little 12-year-old girl had gone flying through the window and laid like dead on the street and bleeding out.

Like that's a little girl. It's real, isn't it? It's a little girl with a soul and a future and she's dead, broken, bleeding out on the street.

Let's put on the hat of our generation and just examine Renee's circumstances. We would be bound to say, she's got an excuse if she doesn't trust in the sovereignty and goodness of God.

[24 : 58] Let's analyze her experiences, the impulses in her life, the stimuli. Her experience dictates to her that she should not believe in a benevolent, sovereign God who is powerful and mighty to save and is good and trustworthy.

You better give up on believing in that kind of God if you're going to have that kind of world view. Here, look at me. Look at me. Here's the great thing.

Here's the incredible thing. God's grace in Renee's life has enabled her in the midst of the worst possible circumstances to hold on to the truth of the Bible.

God is good. God is good. Before anything else, God is good. God is loving and God is sovereign. God is sovereign over all things, all peoples and she can hang on to that.

That is God's grace in her life. She doesn't swim in the sea of experience dictating what she believes because there's no excuse.

[26 : 13] I don't care who you are. I don't care what you do for a job and I don't care what your experience was growing up, whether you suffered a lot or a little. There's no excuse for going to the Bible and saying, that God doesn't exist.

I can't trust in a good God. I don't trust in the sovereignty of God. He must be powerless. He must be not loving. Maybe he can't do anything about it. There's no excuse. The Bible says it and it's true and we have to trust it.

We have to trust it. Let me give you one other example. This might push a little bit deeper.

This might hurt a little bit. What about when it comes to homosexuality? You've got a homosexual friend.

You've got a homosexual sister. Everything in your experience tells you that their relationship with their homosexual partner is loving.

[27 : 27] It's valid. it's good. They take care of one another. You love them. They love each other. Everything in your experience tells you that you should accept their lifestyle.

I want to tell you there is no excuse for accepting their lifestyle. If you want to read the Bible you need to accept the Bible on its own terms.

You need to read it as the word of God which is authoritative. Remember it's not underneath us it is above us. It tells us what right relationships look like. It tells us that God created man and female good and he gave them to one another for a relationship.

That marriage is between one man and one woman for life. It dictates what we believe about relationships and I know I know listen I know this is hard.

I've had these friends and I have these friends and I love them but there's no excuse for compromising what we believe to be true from the word of God based on our experience.

[28 : 40] That's it. There's one gospel. There's one truth. There's one gospel source. Guys, please, please don't fall into the milieu, into the river of today's philosophy of how we interpret what is true and what is not.

I'll finish with this. I know I've gone over. Third reason, I reckon he's appealing to his experience, his testimony. Our testimony is good. Here's what we haven't done good here for a while.

We haven't had some testimonies. Right? When you hear about someone becoming Christian, it's encouraging. So, we'll do more of that. Anyway, testimony. He's given his testimony and the reason he's done it, the third reason I think, is to embolden the believers in Galatia.

He knows that they've gone soft. He's told them that he can't believe how quickly they've given up and he wants to make them bold to stand for the truth. And so, he says, listen, my life is forfeit because of what I am saying.

He was at the pinnacle of the Jewish faith. He was killing Christians. Christian, he's dead. And in the end, he's going to be killed for his faith.

[29 : 56] And he wants that to embolden the other believers there. Stand for truth. Be willing to lose everything for the gospel. I know that possibly I've lost some friends here tonight because of what I've said about the gospel.

Maybe you'll never come back. That hurts. But we've got to be willing to stand up for what we believe. Those who stand for nothing will fall for anything.

And just by way of encouragement to us too, final encouragement, I reckon the encouragement of this passage for us, maybe for us today, is for you in your uni class, in your workplace, I was speaking to some of you the other night who were saying you just don't feel like you've got enough knowledge to be able to stand up for your faith.

We hear that a lot, don't we? I just don't know enough about the Bible, I don't know, you've quoted Marxism, I don't know who that is, is that Groucho, you know, maybe that's where you're at. And I don't claim to know everything at all, far from it, if you know me at all you'll know that's true.

But here's the thing, I totally believe that as Christians we have far more foundation for what we believe than anyone else just about that we come into contact with.

[31 : 13] Apart from a very, very small minority of intellectuals who you probably aren't friends with anyway, because no one is, apart from those guys, you know more about your faith than they do.

They have a faith by the way. Atheists have great faith in their atheism. Agnostics, they don't really have faith in anything but they have faith in what they don't have faith in. And everyone who we know who hasn't been saved by the gospel has faith in complete relativity, in the fact that there is no real truth.

Now listen, if anyone challenges you for the basis, the truth for what you believe, I want you to be confident and I want you to be confident to say back to them, what is the basis for your truth?

And see them squirm as they try and find something that isn't there. And then say, the basis for my truth is I believe the Bible is the word of God. God's profitable for all people at all times in history.

Remember Saul converted to become another person entirely. Remember the people in your church who stand with you as the army of Christ, how God's been working in their life.

[32 : 32] Think about the solid basis for the truth that you hold and then throw it back at them. Just have fun with it and you'll get better at it as you go and you never know if you pray enough and if God moves, you'll see them come to faith in Jesus as well and that's the goal.

I think I've talked enough. I think what we really need to do above anything else, above talking anymore at all, is just to pray and ask for God's help in all of this because this is really big stuff. So please, if you love Jesus, bow your heads with me and we'll pray and ask for his help.

Amen. Amen. Jesus said, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me.

And Father, we do recognize, particularly in today's society, that that is a really offensive thing. But we read in the Bible that the cross is an offense.

And if it's not an offense, then it's probably not the gospel. So please give us courage to stand for our faith, to stand for Jesus when the world around us is turning against us.

[33 : 49] Help us to remember the example of Paul who went to death on the count of his faith, to remember the vast majority of the disciples who were killed for what they believed. Please help us to walk in their ways.

Lord, please help us in the midst of our hurts, in the midst of very complex and difficult cultural situations and situations in relationships.

Please help us to be compassionate, benevolent, loving, prayerful, accepting, and yet always seasoned with the salt of the gospel.

Lord, please make us different. Lord, please save us from limp-wristed, weak, wimpy Christianity that isn't Christianity at all.

Father, as a community, as the 6pm congregation, please help us to encourage one another to stand for the gospel. Please help us to keep each other accountable for that.

[34 : 52] and please, Lord, continue to move among us to make us more like Jesus, who wasn't ashamed to stand for the truth. I pray it all in his name.

Amen. Amen.