

Paul's Gospel from God

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[0:00] In life, people really want to know that they're getting the real deal. When I typed into Google, because Google has all the answers they say, knowing you're getting the real deal, all these relationship websites came up actually, like this one on the next slide. He's the one, 19 ways to know if he's the real deal. And on the next slide, number 12 was he buys her flowers for no reason, which means I'm in trouble. I'm not the real deal. But people really want to know they're getting the real deal in this context so that they're confident they're not wasting their time. Or it's the same when we buy things online or at shops. We want to know we're getting the real deal so we can be confident we're not wasting our money. Or when it comes to buying food, especially if you have allergies, you want to be confident you're getting the real deal so that you know you're not going to get sick. For example, did you hear about the Melbourne lady who misread an Aldi label on an Easter egg just a few weeks ago and ended up in intensive care? I think it was even Box Hill Hospital. On the next slide is one of the headlines.

[1:12] I think it was dairy fine and she thought it was dairy free, which sounds funny until you realize that she nearly died from it. The point is certainty. We want certainty because that leads to confidence. We want to know with certainty that you're getting the real deal so we can be confident. We're not wasting our time, our money, our effort or even risking our lives. But as Christians, how do we know we've got the real deal when it comes to the message of Jesus? How can we be certain that Paul's gospel is the true gospel? Such that we can be confident we're not wasting our time being here this morning. Or we're not wasting our money or effort or even putting our eternal lives in danger. How do we know Paul's gospel is the real deal?

[2:09] That's the issue that Paul addresses in our passage today. But first, let me remind you of the background, particularly if you weren't here last week. Last week we saw that there were some false teachers who'd gone to the various churches around the region of Galatia and they were saying that Paul's gospel message about Jesus was not enough to save people. Remember the word gospel just means good news. It's the good news about Jesus who died and rose again as Lord and Savior. And Paul's gospel said on the next slide that you have to have faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior plus nothing equals salvation. The teachers, however, going around were saying, no, no, no. You've got to add different works of the law, Old Testament law in particular. They were saying things like circumcision if they want to be saved. And so their gospel was faith plus works is salvation.

But as we saw last week, if you add extra requirements to the gospel or subtract from it, then you change it. In fact, in chapter 1, verse 7 of your Bibles there, Paul actually says you pervert the gospel because you change it from something that saves to something that condemns.

It was like the lifeboat ring. Do you remember this, what I showed you last week? It was like this lifeboat ring that you sometimes get on the boats. But before someone throws it to someone drowning to save them, they go, oh, we might just add to it this big weight, which weighs it out.

[3 : 41] I'm not going to throw it again. When I did it in the old church, it nearly went through the floor actually last week. But you change the gospel. It goes from something that saves to something that drowns.

That was last week. But the question this week is, okay, Paul, that's what you say. But how do we know? How do we know that your gospel is the true one that we shouldn't change?

Whose gospel is right? So what Paul writes to them this week is so that they can know with certainty that the gospel he preached is the real deal.

And he does it so that they might confidently stick with it, which is basically chapters 1 to halfway to chapter 5, and then confidently live in light of it, which is the rest of chapter 5 and 6.

Now we see his big point, really, in verse 11 and 12. Have a look in your Bibles in verse 11 and 12. Paul writes, You see, Paul wants them to know that his gospel is not from men.

[5 : 00] It's not an invention that he received. Rather, it's from God through Jesus Christ. It's God's gospel, the real deal. He says something similar about his apostleship in verse 1.

He said that he was set aside as an apostle, not by men or from men, but from Jesus Christ and God the Father, like Jeremiah was in our first reading.

Now this revelation of Jesus is what happened to him on the road to Damascus. He was on his way to Jerusalem to arrest Christians when the risen Jesus appeared to him and literally stopped him in his tracks.

And so significant was this revelation. We're told about it three times in the book of Acts. We heard just the first time in our second reading. But the third time in the book of Acts, Paul gives us some extra details.

He says this on the next slide. He recalls how Jesus said, I am sending you, Paul, to the Gentiles to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.

[6 : 17] Notice it's not faith plus works, said Jesus. But faith alone. And so how can the Galatians know with certainty that Paul's gospel is the true gospel?

Well, because Paul got it directly from Christ Jesus himself. It's straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. Not that I'm calling Jesus a horse, of course, like the famous Mr. Ed, if you remember that show.

Paul's gospel is the true gospel because it's direct from Jesus himself. I used to be a primary school teacher, and one of the games that we do with the kids at the end of the day, if they were tired, was that game Chinese whispers.

I think the Chinese invented it. But it's where, you know the game, it's where the kids kind of sit in a circle, or they stand in a line, sit in a line, and you tell the first one at this end a message, and they've got to whisper it to the person next to them all the way down the other line.

And the point of the game is to see if the message that started at this end is the same message that ends up down that end. But often it's not, no. For a joke one time, I started down this end with, Mr. Price is the best teacher at school.

[7:27] And by the time I ended up down that end, it was, Mr. Price is the worst teacher in the world. I'm pretty sure I know who changed it. It was the kid who got in trouble earlier that day. It was payback.

But you see, if I went directly to the last student at the end and told him the message myself, then there's no chance that they get it wrong, is there?

You see, God, through a revelation of Jesus, went straight to Paul as the last apostle. Directly. And so there's no chance Paul got it wrong. There's no chance that as the message was passed along to Paul, someone changed it, perhaps someone who didn't like circumcision, so they dropped that out and the false teachers are just putting it back in.

No, no. Paul got his gospel straight from Jesus himself, so the Galatians can know with certainty Paul's gospel is the true one that saves.

But how do they know then no one else actually interfered and taught him as well? And how do they know that Jesus really did appear to Paul on the Damascus road?

[8:32] Well, Paul now backs up that claim by pointing to his isolation and his transformation. So point two in your outlines of verse 13 in your Bibles. He says, For you've heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it.

I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb like Jeremiah and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his son to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia and later I returned to Damascus. Here Paul backs up the fact that his gospel is not from any other human because he didn't consult any other human.

He didn't even go up to Jerusalem where the other apostles were to be instructed by them. He was isolated. In fact, we heard in that reading from Acts that Annette gave that he sat blind without food or water for three days.

What do you think he was doing for those three days? Sleeping? Well, no, because by the end of it, he wasn't rested. We're told he needed strengthening. Rather, I take it he was making sense of the vision he saw with what he knew from his Old Testament Bible.

[10:10] And he could do that without having to read it because Paul knew it. We just heard how he was advancing beyond many of his own age. Paul was in the gifted and talented program.

He knew his Bible. And he'd also heard what Christians had said. He was there when Stephen gave his speech and was stoned to death. Do you remember? And now that he'd seen the risen Jesus, which proved Jesus was the Messiah, the promised king, this key bit of information unlocked the true meaning of the Old Testament for him.

Can you imagine being in Paul's brain during those three days with all those electrical sparks flying or all those connections he was making?

So much so that after three days, he knew the gospel. Sure, he no doubt grew in his understanding over time, just like we do. But at this point, he knew Jesus was the Messiah who died to bring us forgiveness of sins.

He knew that salvation was by faith alone in him. He heard it directly from Christ on the road. He knew it and believed it. Such that when Ananias arrived, he was baptized and at once started preaching it.

[11:25] The point is, Paul's isolation from other people, other teachers, especially the apostles in Jerusalem, means he did not receive his gospel from them.

And so how did he know it? How was he able to immediately preach it so powerfully? Well, it's evidence that he got it from Jesus, isn't it?

You see, his isolation backs up his claim. He didn't get it from others, but he got it from Christ himself. And so does his transformation, verse 18. He says, then after three years of preaching the gospel, he did go up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas or Peter, and he stayed with him 15 days.

He says, I saw none of the other apostles, only James, Jesus' brother. I assure you before God that what I'm writing you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea.

That are in Christ. They only heard the report. The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy. And they praise God because of me.

[12:37] Here is an amazing transformation. Paul went from preacher to persecutor. And all the churches of Judea praise God for it.

Now, this was a huge transformation. In fact, when he finally went to Jerusalem after three years of preaching the gospel, we're told that only Peter and James, Jesus' brother, met with Paul.

Do you know why it was only those two? Well, because on the next slide, the rest were scared. When Paul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was really a disciple.

You see, his transformation was so huge, it was just so hard to believe. That's how big it was. And such a huge transformation suggests something equally huge happened to change him like that, like meeting the risen Jesus.

In a sad way, it's like hearing those stories, which I'm sure you've all heard of people who have come back from war, and they've seen something shocking over there, and it's completely changed them.

[13:46] You heard stories like that? That's another reason why we should keep praying for peace. But in a positive way, Paul's transformation is also because he saw something shocking, or shocking to him, that Jesus is risen.

He really is the King. And so Paul's isolation and his transformation back up his claim that he didn't get his gospel from other people, but directly from Jesus, which in turn helps the Galatians know for certain that his gospel is the true one, you see.

And in fact, if that's not enough evidence, he now tells the Galatians that the apostles, the bigwigs in Jerusalem, they also back up his gospel, for they confirm it and even affirm his apostleship as well.

So point three, chapter two, verse one. He says, Then after 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also.

I went in response to another revelation, and meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, the apostles, I presented them the gospel that I preached among the Gentiles.

[14:58] I wanted to be sure that I was not running and had not been running my race in vain, he writes. Now here, Paul refers to another revelation. This time, we think it's from a prophet called Agabus, because on the next slide, we read in Acts chapter 11, that this prophet called Agabus predicted, he had a prediction, a revelation that there would be a famine in Jerusalem.

And so the church in Antioch decided to send some money to help their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, and they sent the money via Paul and Barnabas. So that's why he's heading up to Jerusalem.

At least 14 years later. And here in Galatians, we're told that Paul also took Titus with him, a fellow Christian worker. Now, while they were in Jerusalem, they met privately with those apostles, and Paul presented his gospel to them to make sure that he was not preaching in vain.

Not that he was worried that he had the wrong gospel. I mean, he had got it straight from Jesus. He was confident he had the right gospel. Rather, he was worried that the apostles might be adding something to the gospel, and so undoing all his work.

You know, he would preach the gospel, and someone would believe and be saved, and then someone from the apostles might come along and preach another gospel of believing plus doing works, and undo Paul's work, make him run in vain.

[16:24] That was what he was really worried about. And so Paul presents his gospel to the apostles for them, not to check it, but to make sure they also had it, so that they could work together in fellowship, not undoing each other's work.

And guess what? They had the same gospel. Verse 3, Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, and to make us slaves again to the law. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you Galatians.

And as for those who were held in high esteem, the apostles, or whatever they were makes no difference to me, God does not show favoritism, they added nothing to my message.

Do you see that last bit? Nothing did they add to Paul's gospel. And by doing so, Paul is telling the Galatians, look, I have the same gospel those apostles that you esteem in Jerusalem have.

[17:34] In other words, the apostles confirmed Paul's gospel. It's like when you used to show your teachers your schoolwork back at school.

If they added no corrections, you knew it was right, didn't you? I got a few corrections occasionally. But here the apostles add no corrections, nothing to Paul's gospel, which means he got it right.

It's confirmation, you see. What's more, we're told how some false teachers slipped into their meeting. It seems demanding Titus be circumcised because he was a Greek, he wasn't a Jew.

But the apostles did not compel Titus to do so. Unlike these false teachers in Galatia, we're compelling the Galatians to do so.

And so here is another confirmation that Paul's gospel of faith in Christ plus nothing equals salvation. Not faith plus works.

[18:37] And for good measure, Paul also points out that the apostles backed up his apostleship too. Verse 7. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles, that's all non-Jews.

Just as Peter had been entrusted to preach to the circumcised or to the Jews. For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles.

James and Cephas or Peter and John, those esteemed pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.

They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the Jews. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing that I had been eager to do all along.

You see, the apostles affirm Paul's apostleship to the Gentiles, don't they? The only thing they added was that Paul should remember the poor. That's the very thing he wanted to do.

[19 : 48] That's why he'd gone to Jerusalem to take this money during this famine. And so the Galatians, again, can know for certain Paul's gospel is true.

It comes not from people, but direct from Christ. It's backed up by his isolation that he didn't get it from others. It's backed up by his transformation that he really did see Jesus.

And the apostles confirmed his gospel and affirmed his apostleship. I'm not sure how much more evidence Paul could give the Galatians, actually. And so the Galatians can know with certainty they have the true gospel, which ought to give them confidence to stick with it and to live in light of it.

Of course, for us, there's been almost 2,000 years since Paul preached the true gospel. So how can we know with certainty that we have it? Well, because Paul's gospel, together with the apostles, has been written down for us in letters like Galatians.

We have it in our Bibles. But hang on a second. How do we know our Bible is the same as theirs that they wrote down all those years ago? Well, because we have loads of evidence to confirm it.

[21 : 07] In fact, we have lots of copies of the New Testament to compare and check to make sure we've got the right message. And we've even got copies that were close to the time it was first written. By way of comparison, have a look on the next slide.

We'll skip that. Next one. Next one. Thank you. This table. So we've got Homer, the Greek poet. We have 643 copies of his work.

And those copies were about 500 years. The ones we've got are dated about 500 years from when he first wrote and dated in his writing. Then Plato, we have seven copies, seven manuscripts.

But there's a 1,200 year gap between our copies that we have and when he first wrote. At Caesar, we have 10 copies of manuscripts and a 1,000 year gap.

The New Testament, we have 24,000 copies of manuscripts and about a 40 to 90 year gap from when they were first written by the apostles and Paul.

[22 : 06] We have evidence, don't we? We have a heap of historical evidence that what they wrote is what we have. And so we too can have certainty.

We can know that we have the true gospel that saves. That we might keep living confidently with it. For example, we can be confident that trusting Christ is not a waste of our life.

For he really did die to bring forgiveness and life eternal. And he really did rise proving he is Lord. If you are here this morning and you haven't put your trust in Jesus, then do check out the evidence.

That you might see that you can know. And for us who do, then knowing with certainty, it gives us confidence we're not wasting our time in following Jesus.

No matter what our work colleagues or friends or family might think and say. No matter if it's an effort to get to church. Or if God doesn't feel close to us.

[23 : 11] Or life is hard. We're still not wasting our time. In fact, the gospel, the true gospel means that God is with us to help us.

I know of someone who recently was diagnosed with cancer. Yet because they are certain the gospel is true or is true. They're confident God is with them to help them through the ups and downs of this process.

Even if it meant bringing them through death to life with him again. Or it also means we can be confident we're not wasting our money to proclaim Christ. We know this message is the true one that saves.

And so supporting this message financially is a wise investment that will return treasure in heaven. I remember doing an evangelistic event at an old church.

And this guy on the committee said, Oh, I've got a thousand dollars burning a hole in my wallet. You can use that. Now, I'm sure it wasn't burning a hole in his wallet. I'm sure there's plenty of other things he could do with the money.

[24:10] But you see, he knew with certainty the gospel was true. That it was the message that saves. And so he was confident his money would not be wasted. It means we can be confident we're not wasting our effort in serving Christ.

Whether it's praying for people in ministries or sending them cards to those who are doing it tough or calling them on the phone to encourage them. Things that I know people here do.

Or whether it's serving on Sundays, doing things up front or in the background like morning tea or the flowers or welcoming. Things that help people come to church and continue in Christ. It's not a waste of energy and effort.

In fact, knowing with certainty we have the true gospel means we can be confident, guaranteed even, of glory to come. Such that our service and work for the Lord, like the things I just mentioned, will be worth it.

As one church sign I saw said on the next slide, said, Come work for the Lord. The work is hard, the hours are long and the pay is low. But the retirement benefits are out of this world.

[25:16] Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you so much that we can have certainty that we have the true gospel that saves. And we thank you that this certainty gives us confidence to continue in Christ.

Please encourage us and help us in this we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.