

Paul's Gospel from God

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[0 : 00] Well, in life, people like to know they're getting the real deal. When I typed into Google, knowing you're getting the real deal, all these relationship websites came up, actually.

So on the next slide, he's the one. 19 ways to know if he's the real deal. Way number 12, the next slide, he buys her flowers for no reason.

I'm in trouble already. But people want to know if they're getting the real deal so they can be confident they're not wasting their time, in this case, with relationships or this particular relationship. It's the same when we buy things at a store or online. We want to know we're getting the real deal so we can be confident we're not wasting our money. Or even if you're buying food, especially if you have allergies, you want to know you're getting the real deal so you can be confident you won't get sick or in some cases die if you've got peanut allergies.

For example, I don't know if you heard, but there was a Melbourne lady who had an Easter egg from Aldi just after Easter Sunday and she misread the label and she actually ended up, I think it's on the next slide, she ended up in Box Hill Hospital in intensive care.

[1 : 14] She almost died from it. The point is, certainty that you're getting the real deal leads to confidence, doesn't it? That you're not wasting your time or money or effort or in some cases not even putting your lives in danger.

But as Christians, how do we know we've got the real deal when it comes to the gospel? How do we know that we're not wasting our time or money or effort or putting our eternal lives in danger? Well, this is the issue that Paul addresses in our passage today. But first, let me remind you of the background since it's been a couple of weeks since we've been in Galatians.

Back then, we saw that there are some false teachers, as Graham mentioned, that had gone to the region of Galatia, a massive region in modern-day Turkey. And they were saying that Paul's gospel was not enough to save people.

And remember, the word gospel means good news and it's the good news about Jesus. And so on the next slide, Paul's gospel said, faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour plus nothing equals salvation.

[2 : 32] But these false teachers were going around saying, no, no, no, no, you've got to add something. It's faith plus works of law, the Old Testament law, like circumcision. That's what you need to do if you really want to have salvation.

And so their gospel was faith plus works equals salvation. But as we saw last week, if you add an extra requirement to the gospel or subtract from it, you actually change the gospel.

In fact, in the words of chapter 1, verse 7, this is stretching your memories, I realise, but a couple of weeks ago, chapter 1, verse 7, if you add or subtract, you pervert the gospel, is what Paul says.

For you change it from something that saves to something that condemns. And I gave you an illustration just to remind you, I said, the gospel is like this, you know, lifeboat thing.

If someone's drowning, you can throw it to them and it saves them. But if you add a big heavy weight to them, like this, I'm not going to throw it again, don't worry, then, you know, oh, I can't even hold. It drowns them.

[3 : 37] You add something to the gospel, it goes from something that saves to something that condemns, drowns. And that's what was happening with the false teachers. That was what we saw two weeks ago. But the question this week is, how do the Galatians know Paul's gospel is the right gospel, the real deal?

How do they know that the false teachers one is actually false? Well, that's what he wants them to know. He wants them to know that they've got the true gospel with certainty, which might lead to them confidently sticking with it and even living in light of it.

We see his big point in verses 11 and 12. Have a look at your Bibles there, verse 11 and 12. He says, 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. You see, Paul wants them to know with certainty that his gospel is not man's gospel. Rather, it's God's gospel given directly from Christ. He says something similar about his apostleship in verse 1. He says that he is an apostle sent not from men nor by men, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father.

[5 : 03] Now, this revelation of Jesus is what happened to him on the road to Damascus. We heard about it in our first reading. He was on his way to Jerusalem, do you remember, to arrest Christians, to have them put in prison or killed, when Jesus appeared to him and literally stopped him in his tracks.

And so significant is this revelation. We're told about it three times in the book of Acts. The first time was our first reading today. But the third time Paul tells the story in Acts, he gives some extra details.

He recalls how Jesus said on the next slide, he said, I am sending you, Paul, to the Gentiles to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, and that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified. How? By works of law? No, by faith in me, said Jesus to Paul on the road to Damascus. And so, the Galatians can know with certainty that Paul's gospel of faith alone is the real deal because he got it directly from Christ himself.

That's the point. It's straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. I'm calling Jesus a horse, of course. Paul's gospel is the true gospel because it's direct from Christ.

[6 : 30] I remember I used to be a primary school teacher and one of the games you'd play with kids on a rainy afternoon when they're sick of work and so are you. is that game Chinese Whispers.

I think the Chinese invented it, although in France it's called the Arabic telephone or something. Anyway, either way, it's where, you know the game, don't you? It's where kids sit in a circle or they sit in a row and you give the first child a message and they've got to whisper it to the next person to the next person along and the idea is to see if the message they started with is the same message the last child ended with.

It often changes, doesn't it? For a joke one time I started with Mr Price is the best teacher at school. By the time I got to the last student it became Mr Price is the worst teacher in the world.

I'm pretty sure I know who changed it. It was the kid that got in trouble earlier that day. It was payback. But if I went directly to the last student and told him or her the message then there's no chance they'd get it wrong, is there?

And that's what God has done for Paul. Through his son he's given directly a message of the gospel straight to Paul, the last apostle. And so there's no chance Paul got it wrong.

[7 : 49] There's no chance that as the message was passed along to Paul someone changed it along the way. Perhaps someone who didn't like circumcision they dropped that bit out and these false teachers are just putting it back in.

No, no, that's not what happened. Paul got his gospel straight from Jesus himself. So the Galatians can know with certainty Paul's gospel is the true gospel that saves.

But hang on, how do they know no one really taught him on the side? And how do they know Jesus really appeared to him? Well Paul backs up his claim by pointing to his isolation and his transformation.

Point to in your outlines verse 13 in your Bibles. He says, for because you have 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 and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles my immediate response was not to consult any human being.

[9 : 07] I did not even go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was but I went into Arabia and later I returned to Damascus. I hear Paul backs up the fact that his gospel is not from any human because he didn't consult any human.

He didn't even go up to Jerusalem where the other apostles were to be instructed by them. Instead he sat without food or water we heard in our first reading for three days.

Now what do you think he was doing for those three days? He wasn't sleeping because by the end we're told in Acts 9 that he needed strengthening. Rather I take it he was making sense of the vision he'd just seen with what he knew from his Old Testament Bible.

And he could do that without reading it because he knew it. Remember Paul was at the top of his class. We just read that he was advancing beyond many of his peers. He was in the gifted and talented program.

He knew his Old Testament. And what's more he also knew what the other Christians were saying. He was at the execution of Stephen. He was holding the cloaks while everyone was throwing stones and killing Stephen.

[10 : 21] He knew what Christians believed. He heard it before they were killed. And now he'd seen the risen Jesus which proved Jesus was the Messiah, the promised King, the Son of God.

This key bit of information then unlocked the true meaning of the Old Testament for him. Can you imagine being inside Paul's brain for those three days? There would have been all these electrons firing, all these connections being made.

It was a massive light bulb moment. So much so that after the three days he knew the gospel. Oh sure he grew in it over time like we all do.

But at this point he knew Jesus was the King who died for sins. And he knew that salvation was by faith in him. Not by earning your way to heaven by doing lots of works.

So much so that when Ananias arrived Paul was baptized, converted and then at once started preaching it while he was staying with those disciples. The point is Paul's isolation from the other teachers especially the apostles in Jerusalem means he did not receive it from anyone else.

[11 : 31] So how did he know it? And how was he immediately able to preach it so powerfully we heard from our first reading? Well because of the revelation from Jesus.

All the evidence points in that direction you see. And what's more so does his transformation. Have a look at verse 18. He says, Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas, that's Peter, and I stayed with him 15 days.

I saw none of the other apostles, only James, the Lord Jesus' brother. I assure you before God that what I'm writing to you is no lie. Then I went to Syria and then 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.

Here is a massive transformation, isn't it? From persecutor to preacher and all the churches of Judea praised God for it.

[12 : 40] Now this was, as I said, a massive transformation. In fact, when he finally went to Jerusalem after the three years, we read there that he met with Peter and James. Do you know why he only met with two of the apostles and not the rest of them?

Well, on the next slide we read this from Acts chapter 9. It says, when Paul came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. In other words, they were too scared to meet with Paul, apart from James and Peter. You see, this transformation was so huge, it was hard to believe.

That's how big it was. And if it's that big, then it would have required something equally big to make it, like meeting the risen Jesus. In a sad way, it's like hearing those stories about people who come back from the war completely transformed.

You've heard of people who have seen things over there and they've come back and they're a completely different person. Well, in a good way, Paul's seen the risen Christ.

[13 : 46] Christ, and it's such a big thing that it's totally changed his life. And so Paul's isolation and his transformation back up his claim that he got it directly from Christ, which in turn shows that his gospel is the real deal.

But in case that's not enough evidence, he now tells the Galatians that the apostles, the big wigs in Jerusalem, they also back up his gospel for they confirm his gospel and affirm his apostleship.

So we're at point three now in chapter two verse one. He says, then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also.

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

I wanted to be sure that I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. Now here Paul refers to another revelation that caused him to go up a few years later after fourteen years.

[14:54] This time we think it was given by a different prophet called Agabus. So on the next slide we read in Acts chapter 11 about how Agabus had a prediction that there would be a famine in Jerusalem.

And so the church in Antioch which is where Paul was, decided to send some money up to help them and they sent it via Paul and Barnabas. And here in Galatians we're told Paul took Titus with him as well, a fellow Christian worker.

Now while they were in Jerusalem they met privately with these bigwig apostles and Paul presented his gospel to them to make sure that he wasn't preaching it in vain.

And not that he was worried about preaching the wrong gospel. After all he'd received it from Jesus himself. Paul was confident he had the right gospel. Rather he was worried that the apostles in Jerusalem might be having the wrong gospel which would hinder his work.

He was worried that every time he would tell a Gentile and non-Jewish person that if you believe in Jesus you're saved, someone from the apostles would come along and say oh no you've got to add works of law as well and then undo all his work.

[16:07] That's what he was worried about. And so Paul presents his gospel to the apostles not for them to check but to make sure they also had it. And guess what?

They did and 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 aspire our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves to the law again.

But we did not give in to them for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And for those who were held in high esteem, the apostles, you know whatever they are makes no difference to me, God does not show favoritism.

Notice, they added nothing to my message. You see, the apostles added nothing to Paul's gospel. And in doing so, they showed that Paul had the real gospel too.

Paul is saying to the Galatians, look, I have the same gospel that the apostles in Jerusalem, the ones you hold in high esteem, have. You can know it's the real deal. It's like when you used to show your teachers at school you're working out and if they added nothing to your test or your piece of writing, you know you're right, weren't you?

[17:29] There are no corrections, you know you had it right. It was the same thing here. The apostles added nothing to Paul's gospel, confirming that it was right. What's more, we're told how the false teachers actually slipped into their meeting, demanding that Titus be circumcised, you know, adding that law to be saved.

But even the apostles didn't compel Titus to do so, unlike the false teachers in Galatia who were compelling the Galatians to do so. In other words, the apostles again backed up Paul's gospel of faith in Christ plus nothing against the false teachers' gospel of faith plus works, like circumcision. And for good measure, Paul also points out that the apostles backed up his apostleship. verse 7. It says, On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, that's the Gentiles, just as Peter had been entrusted with the task of preaching to the gospel, to the circumcised, that's the Jews.

For God who was work in Peter as an apostle to the Jews was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those esteemed as 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 that we should do is to remember the poor, the very thing that I had been eager to do all along.

[19:05] You see, the apostles recognized Paul's calling as an apostle to the Gentiles and gave him the right hand of fellowship so that together they could proclaim Christ and see people saved.

The only thing they added was that Paul should remember the poor, which is the very reason he had come to Jerusalem in the first place, remember? There was famine, so he'd come up with money to help the poor. And so the Galatians can know with certainty Paul's gospel is true, for it comes not from people but directly from Christ.

Paul's isolation and transformation back that up, as well as the apostles' confirmation and affirmation back that up. I'm not sure how much more evidence Paul could give that he had the real

deal.

And the Galatians therefore can know it with certainty and therefore live confidently with it, stick with it, and live in light of it as well. Of course, for us here in Melbourne, there's been almost 2,000 years since Paul preached the true gospel, so how can we know with certainty that what we have in our Bibles here today is Paul's true gospel back then, 2,000 years ago?

And the answer is because Paul, together with the others, wrote it down and it's been faithfully handed down through the generations. And we know that because of our historical evidence.

[20 : 34] In fact, we have so many copies of the New Testament and we can know with certainty we've got the real message because we can compare and contrast and see what was missing or what was changed. And they're copies from all different regions, so they weren't just kind of isolated.

Let me show you a table to kind of put it into comparison. Here is a table. Homer, not Homer Simpson, Homer the Greek poet, we've got 643 copies of his writings.

And the time, our earliest copy from when he wrote, given the dating that he put in his writings, is a period of 500 years. Okay? Plato, a philosopher, we have seven copies of his writings and there's a gap of 1,200 years between our earliest copy and what he wrote.

At Caesar, we've got 10 copies of him and historical evidence for him and there's a 1,000 year gap. For the New Testament, we have 24,000 copies and about a 40 to 90 year gap of our earliest copy from when it was started to be written.

In other words, we have a heap of historical evidence. What they wrote is what we have. And so we can know with certainty we have the true gospel.

[21 : 56] And Paul's purpose for the Galatians was to know it so that they might confidently live in light of it. Stick with it against these false teachers. Live it out in their lives.

And it's the same application for us. What we can know is certainly we have the true gospel that saves directly from Christ to Paul, faithfully handed down to us so that we might confidently stick with it.

For our gospel lacks nothing to save those who believe. And so do you? Do you believe? For Jesus really did die to bring forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

And he really did rise proving he is Lord. If you're here this morning and you're not quite sure if you believe, then check out the evidence. There's actually a stack of it. And for us who do believe, then we can be confident we don't have to add anything to this gospel to be saved.

I don't know if you've ever had a JW knock at your door. They're very nice people generally. But they have a false gospel. On the next slide is a screenshot from their website.

[23 : 04] And the question is, is belief in Jesus all we need to be saved? And their answer? No. And then they misquote the book of James to back them up.

That's what they say. But because we can be certain we've got the true gospel, then we need not fear what these people say. In fact, we can stand up and say, no, I'm confident we've got the true gospel, that it's by faith alone, in Christ alone.

And confidently stick with it in the face of false teachers. Second, knowing we have the real gospel means we can have confidence not just to stick with it, but also to live in light of it.

That this is where Paul is going in his letter. In other words, we can be confident we're not wasting our lives trusting in Christ. Or more specifically, we can be confident we're not wasting our time following Christ.

No matter what our work colleagues, friends or family say. And no matter if it's an effort to get to church, or even if it sometimes feel like God's not that close to us, or that life's been hard, we can know we're on the right track, even when it doesn't feel like it sometimes.

[24 : 16] I think I've mentioned to you before about a lady I used to visit who passed away last year, whose life was really hard. She couldn't walk, feed herself, or even shower herself, which meant other people had to.

It's pretty humiliating. And her non-Christian children told her her faith in Christ was a waste of time. Just give up, they said. But she was certain she had the true gospel.

And that gave her confidence to keep spending time reading her Bible and following Christ, despite her life. It also means we're not wasting our money to proclaim Christ.

For we know we've got the real message that actually saves, that makes people right with God, guarantees heaven, life to come. And so any money we give is a wise investment that returns

treasure in heaven.

I remember doing an evangelistic event at my old church and this guy, we needed some money to, it was a soccer program. We needed some money for soccer balls and goals and so on.

[25 : 19] And this guy in our meeting said, I've got a thousand bucks burning a hole in my wallet. You can use that. I'm pretty sure it wasn't burning a hole in his wallet. I'm pretty sure there was lots of other things he could do with it. But you see, he was certain the gospel was true, which then led to him confidently knowing using his money this way was a wise investment.

It wouldn't be wasted. And it means we can be confident we're not wasting our effort in serving Christ either. Whether it's praying for people and ministries or ringing up to encourage one another, sending emails to see how one another's going, things I know people here do.

Or whether it's serving on Sundays, doing things up front or in the background like welcoming and morning tea and those sorts of things. Because it's helping people come to church and continue in Christ.

And therefore, it's not a waste of energy or effort because we know we've got the real gospel.

Because we've got the real gospel, which says Christ not only saves us from our sins, but will save us from death later, bring us to a new heavens and earth.

We can be confident we're not wasting our time or money or effort, but that it'll all be worth it. As one church sign said on the next slide, it says, come work for the Lord.

[26 : 34] The work is hard, the hours are long and the pay is low, but the retirement benefits are out of this world. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that we can have certainty that we have the real gospel, that you gave it to the Apostle Paul direct from Christ himself, and that we have evidence that has been faithfully handed down to us.

And so knowing with certainty that we have the true gospel may give us confidence to keep living for Christ, not adding to this gospel or subtracting from it, but serving Christ in light of it.

We ask these things in his name. Amen.