

No Other Gospel

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 3rd of August 2003. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled No Other Gospel and is based on Galatians chapter 1 verses 1 to 10.

Tantrum. But Paul claiming that there are some things that are true. They are not negotiable. Paul says here that he's going to put aside tact and courtesy because there are some things that are very important.

As verse 6 says, they are turning to a different gospel. The integrity of the gospel message is what is at stake here and Paul will not tolerate it. It is worth making a stand.

Well, it's important to understand the background of what is happening here. Paul has given us a bit of Paul Barker, that is, not Paul the Apostle. Paul Barker has given us a bit of a background to how Paul came and planted the churches in Galatia.

[1 : 0 6] It appears as we read through Galatians that another group sometime later has come through after Paul and started preaching a different gospel. They've started to preach something, as we've seen here, that is different to the gospel that they first received.

And as we look through Galatians, it seems clear that at the heart of the issue is that of the Old Testament law. What is the place of the Old Testament law for Christians?

We see this in chapter 4, verse 21. 4, verse 21 says, I wish I was present with you now and could change my tone. Oh, that's not it. Is it 4, 12? Oh, I think I've got the wrong verse there.

6, verse 12 certainly is the right one, I'm hoping. Gosh, I've got the wrong verse there. Is it those who want to make a good showing in the flesh that try to compel you to be circumcised?

So, in chapter 6, verse 12, Paul is saying there that he's compelling them to be circumcised. 4, 21. Oh, yes. 4, 21 is the idea of wanting them to come back under the law.

[2 : 0 9] Anyhow, it's clear from the book that what's at the heart of the problem here is the place of the Old Testament law. The Jews had received this law 1,000 years prior to this point, over 1,000 years before them.

It was the thing that defined them as the people of God. The gospel came along and has told them that they have been set free from this law, that Christ has fulfilled the law.

But you can understand the Jews of the day finding it very hard to remove themselves or to detach themselves from this type of teaching. In fact, there are some that I totally think it's unconceivable that the whole law has been abandoned.

But back in Jerusalem, there is huge trouble and strife, it appears. People have been persecuted for this stand where the law has been fulfilled in Christ. And there's this persecution going on.

So, a group are sent out to go out and follow Paul. These Judaizers, Jewish Christians, going out and trying to give some credence to the law. Because if you follow the law or parts of the law, then the suffering won't be so bad.

[3 : 16] But what is exactly this message that they're preaching? These Judaizers, these Jewish Christians who are going out, who are preaching this different gospel. It seems to me that Paul takes issue in three areas.

Three areas. The first one is, is that of legalism. The first issue is that believers can earn their salvation by obeying God's rules.

That by somehow obeying the laws, you can earn salvation from God. The second point that Paul takes issue is that of racialism. This group believed in the superiority of the Jewish laws.

Not so much the moral laws of the Ten Commandments. But as we look through Galatians, we see it's those laws that are that are over ceremonial laws, over cultural markers, things like circumcision, dietary food laws and festivals.

These are the type of things that they want to bring the Christians back to. If you want to be saved, then you need to come and have these markers. What they're saying is, for the Gentile, the people that Paul preached to are outside the Jewish race.

[4 : 26] If you truly want to have the full benefits of being a Christian, of enjoying God, being a part of God's people, well then you need to have these markers. You need to become a Jew. You need to be circumcised.

You need to obey the Sabbath and dietary laws. The third area, we've got legalists, racists, racialists and normists is the third one. This is a subtle point.

It's slightly different from that of legalism. But it is nonetheless important. The normists believed you couldn't earn your place in heaven, but insisted that if you wanted to remain in God's family, if you wanted to remain as a part of God's covenantal family, then you had to obey the law.

If you wanted to be sanctified, if you wanted to be made perfect, then you needed to obey this law. That is the way that you would be holy and godly, by obeying the law. You can understand, I guess, the Jews being a little bit nervous about the Gentiles coming into the Christian church.

You know, here are these Gentiles with their idols and their wayward practices coming in and being Christian and Paul's saying, look, you have been set free. You don't need to do these things to be a Christian.

[5 : 38] You can understand the Jews feeling a little nervous. Oh, what if they bring in an idol? Or, you know, what if they start saying things and doing things and being a little bit nervous about it all?

But as we look through the book of Galatians, we're going to see that Paul rebukes this. He's going to say that justification or our salvation is not by works, but by faith.

You can't earn your way to heaven. The only way we get to heaven is because of what God has done. It is by faith. And number two, that there are no more barriers anymore. There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free.

We are all one in Christ. This distinction of becoming a Jew no longer stands to be a part of God's family. And the last, that being sanctified, the idea of being made holy is not by the law, but by God's spirit.

Well, you can imagine the group that are moving around. These Judaizers are moving around following Paul's movements and they're little evangelists, you know, little preaching groups. And they're about to start their little campaign of get back to Moses.

[6 : 39] Get back to Moses. That's where we want to be. But before they can do that, they're going to have to deal with the problem of Paul's authority. They're going to have to discredit Paul's message. Because Paul's come through and said that they are now free in Christ.

They're going to have to discredit him. The best way, I guess, to discredit Paul's message is to attack his apostolic authority. So, as we read between the lines here in Galatians, you can imagine them claiming that, oh, Paul, Paul wasn't one of the original 12, you know.

He's not one of the 12 apostles that walked around with Jesus all that time. He doesn't have the correct version. Or, you can imagine them sort of going around and saying, look, Peter and Paul, they've had their differences.

They've had a bit of a fight, you know, and they actually don't see eye to eye on things. A wedge driven between Peter, the apostle, who was in Jerusalem, his ministry to the Jews, and a wedge between Paul.

We'll see more of that later on. Perhaps they're going to claim that Paul's got mixed motives in this whole thing. That Paul is only really claiming this message because it's going to maximise his evangelism.

[7 : 48] This is a cheap evangelistic line. If you want to get converts and you've got to say, you want to be a convert, come and be circumcised. Would you want to be a convert?

This is just a cheap line by Paul saying, look, if you want Paul trying to get large numbers, trying to draw lots of crowds in, it's a fairly easy message, isn't it? Don't worry about the circumcision. When we look in verse 10, we see that Paul makes it very clear where his motives lie.

Am I now seeking human approval or God's approval? Am I trying to please people? If I was still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ. Paul makes it clear that he is not trying to win people's approval.

He's not trying to win them by cheap tricks, by giving them an easy message. His motivation is trying to please God. When we look in verse 8, it says there, but even if an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaim to you, let that one be accursed.

Notice there, but even if we are an angel. Paul puts the message for himself, puts himself in that category. He knows the consequences very clearly. He knows that he comes under that anathema, that accursedness.

[9 : 02] And so he submits his own authority to the authority of the gospel. As we look through, we will see that Paul's authority is something that is very important, particularly as we look next week in next week's sermon.

The issue of Paul's authority is very important. But as I've just pointed out, what is of utmost importance is that of the gospel. It's interesting when we look back in verses 1 through to 5, the beginning of the letter that Paul writes, These two big themes come out very clearly and strongly.

That are Paul's authority and the integrity of the gospel. Normally when you write a letter, you might write something like this. Dear Mum, thank you for your Christmas present.

Socks again. What a surprise. Thank you very much. Yours sincerely, Paul. There's a bit of a standard pattern, a cultural standard that has been set up.

Dear such and such, your message. And at the end, you might put sincerely yours and your name. Well, there were cultural standards back then for their letters.

[10 : 07] And as we look through not just this letter, but other letters of that time, what normally happened was you would have the writer's name first. So who was writing the letter would come right at the very beginning.

Then you would have who it is addressed to and then some form of greetings, some type of salutations. When we look at Paul's letters in particular, it often starts like this.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Then he goes, who he is addressing to, to the church in Galatians or Corinthians. After that, he would normally start by grace and peace to you.

And he keeps on going from there. The fourth point he would normally go is, I always thank God for you because of dot, dot, dot. There's normally a section there thanking God for a particular attribute of this church.

And then the last point is, as a part of the introduction to his letter, he would say, and I am praying for you, dot, dot, dot. I'm praying that they might grow in the knowledge of Christ. Let's have a look at the beginning of the letter of Galatians where we see these two great themes come out.

[11 : 10] The part one is the same. Paul, an apostle. Here Paul makes it very clear right at the very beginning about his authority. Paul, an apostle. Paul was an apostle.

He is claiming that he is an official representative of Jesus Christ. He is one who has authority to speak as Christ's representative, as Christ himself.

But he goes on to talk more about his authority there. Look there. Ascent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead and all the members of God's family who are with me.

Here we see that Paul is not sent by human authority. It's not a human authority that has sent him out on his missionary journeys. It is God and Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

They're the ones who have sent Paul out. That's where his apostleship comes from. His authority comes from God, not from humans. Paul's making the point here that these false teachers that have come through, they've come through with a human authority.

[12 : 16] But Paul's authority, it comes from God, from Jesus. That's where his authority is. This, as I said, this introduction highlights just at this point here the point of authority which continues throughout the rest of the letter.

The next part, he then addresses it to the letters, to the churches of Galatia, fairly standard in the format. Then the next part is, grace to you. Here's the greetings. Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

But then he goes on to explain, in that part there, he explains where this grace and peace comes from. From God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. He goes on to talk about the gospel, the gospel message.

Look there in verse 4. Who gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age according to the will of God, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Paul's gospel is a gospel of salvation. Salvation by grace, where people are set free from their sins, where they are forgiven, where they are set free from the present evil age, not by the law.

[13 : 26] Notice Paul says nothing about the law there. It is grace. It is a gift of God. It is not earned. It is not something that they do. Salvation is by grace.

Paul makes it very clear at the beginning, his gospel, a gospel of salvation by grace. The next part that we look in Paul's letters, we are expecting a thanksgiving there. I thank God for what is happening in your church.

What do we see there in verse 6? The next thing we are expecting, a thanksgiving. What do we have? I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel.

Not that there is another gospel, but there are some who are confusing you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, you are an angel from heaven, should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaim to you, let that one be accursed, as we have said before.

So I now repeat, if anyone proclaims to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let that one be accursed. Paul is drawing a line on the ground.

[14 : 31] He is saying that there is only one gospel. It is the gospel of grace. He is not here defending his pride. He is defending the truth of the gospel.

It is the gospel of grace, the self-giving of Jesus. There is no other gospel. It is this or nothing. All roads don't lead to Rome.

All gospels don't lead to God. The one true gospel, the gospel that they received, is the way of salvation. That's intolerant. You can hear society crying it out, can't you?

That is so intolerant. How arrogant of us. How arrogant of Paul to proclaim such a message, to say there's only one way. During last week, we had to go to a seminar which all the clergy were at.

During the seminar, there was a Buddhist monk on the video who was talking about the fact that really, we're all on about the same thing. We're all talking about the same thing.

[15 : 32] This Buddhist monk was saying. And at that point, some Anglican ministers clapped and cheered. How narrow-minded we are. How totally unfashionable we are to our post-modern pluralistic society.

It is a society that claims that there is no ultimate truth. That everything is subjective. Not objective. If it's true for you, that's great, but it may not be true for anyone, so it doesn't really matter. There's no real tangible truth is the message of our society.

But Paul, he says, no, there is truth. The truth of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Well, that brings us to us. How faithful have you been to the one true gospel?

Think back on your conversations with non-Christians. Have you been tempted to make it a little bit more palatable? Attempted to trim the gospel to make it more attractive to your listeners? Perhaps you've been silent.

Perhaps you haven't spoken up about the gospel truth at all. We live in interesting times. I think we've actually already started moving on from a post-modern society. We're moving into a society that is starting to cry out for meaning.

[16 : 37] They're looking for answers. They want to know if there is a truth out there. And the problem is, if we keep our mouths shut and don't stand up and say anything, what will happen is there'll be others who will come along.

People who proclaim a different gospel. Cults. New Age cults. They'll be seduced into listening to them because they'll be the voices that will be speaking out. Not the voice of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

They'll cling on to anything they can get. Are we declaring the good news of Jesus? I guess there's also another problem to think about is when do you speak on such issues?

Here is Paul taking a stance for the gospel. But at other points, Paul is saying, you know, for the sake of unity, we need to perhaps live together on some issues.

Where do we draw this line between where we stand up and make a stand and where we don't, where we work together? I think there's issues that we need to be informed and work through with the Bible.

[17 : 37] We need to allow God's spirit to be working in us and helping us to know what to stand up for and what not to stand up for. We need to recognise, just to bring this all to a close, we need to recognise that Paul's message is the message of Jesus Christ.

We must accept what Paul has to say about the gospel. Paul claims this authority that he speaks as Christ's representative. I remember a friend of mine who was at university and said that she would never read anything but the gospels because anything outside the gospels wasn't the truth.

It didn't have that same authority as when we actually have the Bible, the gospel messages. And as you look in different Christian bookshops, you can find Bibles with the very words of Jesus, the red letters.

There's the place of the most authority. Paul is claiming here that he speaks as Christ's ambassador. We must submit to what has been said. We need to be people who are pleasing God, not humans.

We're going to face great pressure in our society to bend the gospel, to make changes to it. We need to recognise that the gospel is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

[18 : 49] We also need to recognise that the outcome of perverting God's gospel is God's wrath. There was one night we'd just been to a Christian convention and we were going to a cafe and I was feeling in a particularly good mood and I noticed some Mormons walking down the road and this Mormon, I was thinking to myself, please come on, talk to me, ask me some questions.

I felt in a particularly, you know, I'm ready to talk tonight. And so we started chatting. He did ask me, he approached me by himself and we started chatting and he was talking, I was talking about the fact that I was a Christian, you know, and that I was saved through Jesus and he was trying to, in a way, sort of say, well yes, that's right, but you actually need to come along to our church.

I said, look, I don't know if you've read Galatians but Galatians says that if you add anything to the gospel, you pervert the gospel of Jesus Christ, even if it's an angel who does that, they'll be accursed.

And this guy got all very nervous. He says, no, no, no, no, no. You're going to go to hell. It was really quite disconcerting. So I'm pointing the finger at me saying I was going to go to hell because I believed in Jesus and wasn't following his message.

Let us be people who do not accept compromise. Let us recognise that if we are to compromise, that Paul's anathema, Paul's accursedness, Paul's on us, the truth is not negotiable.

[20 : 20] Amen.