

Getting the Gospel Right

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Date: 16 June 2019

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- [0 : 00] If you'd like to turn in your Bibles to Galatians chapter 4, beginning at verse 8.
- If I can sort of preface this reading with just a simple statement, and that would be, it's important to get the gospel right.
- And Galatians, as a letter is written to the church, that they would get the gospel right. Because many in the church have got the gospel wrong.
- And that's essentially what this letter is about. Paul is writing a letter to the church to people who have been saved by God, but who now have got the message of God, the gospel, wrong.
- And that is leading to troubles in the church, and of course, big troubles for evangelism, because it means that you're propelling a false gospel.
- [1 : 18] So, Galatians chapter 4, beginning in verse 8. We'll read to verse 20. Now hear God's word.
- Brothers, I entreat you, become as I am, for I also have become as you are.
- You did me no wrong. You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first. And though my condition was a trial to you, you did not scorn or despise me, but received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus.
- What then has become the blessing you felt? For I testify to you that if possible, you would have gorged out your eyes and given them to me.
- I have then become your enemy by telling you, have I then become your enemy by telling you the truth. They make much of you, but for no good purpose.
- [2 : 55] They want to shut you out, that you may make much of them. It is always good to be made much of for a good purpose, and not only when I am present with you.
- My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you. I wish I could be present with you now, and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you.
- Well, may God bless the reading of his word. It's the only bit that's truly accurate. So we'll ask God to bless that, and we'll sing, and then we'll come back to God's word.
- Amen. Well, please, if you have your Bibles, turn again to Galatians chapter 4.
- As you do that, can I sort of almost begin this message by perhaps raising a topic that I won't be raising in the body of the message itself.
- [4 : 18] But when Paul speaks of the thorn that is in his side that he asked the Lord to remove, and the Lord's response to him was, my grace is sufficient, over in Corinthians, there's been great debate as to what that thorn in the flesh actually was.
- You know, some people jibed that it could have been a wife, or other things like that, which is so wrong, you would never hear a minister say that. It was another minister who said that, I'm just passing it on.

But it seems very, very likely that it was his eyesight, that the thorn in the flesh was his eyesight. Here in our reading, we've read that the Galatians loved Paul so much that they would have gorged out their own eyes and given them to Paul, indicating that that was his failing.

At the end of Galatians, in chapter 6, verse 11, he actually says, see with what large letters I am writing to you. But Galatians is only six chapters.

Romans is much longer. Corinthians is much longer. It seems very likely that the large letters that he's speaking to is not the length, but actually the letters themselves, because he suffers with his eyesight.

[5 : 32] So it seems very likely that the thorn in Paul's flesh was the fact that he had, well, it's clear that he had difficulty with his eyes. A trial for him, to which God said, my grace is sufficient for you.

God didn't make them better. He just gave him grace daily to be able to live with it. So there's just a little bit of background information, as it were, on Paul.

But our duty this morning is to be able to come to the book of Galatians in our overview and understand what it's saying. And what it's saying is this, that the gospel is clear, that the gospel is simple.

You don't need to be a genius to get up and preach the gospel. It's really fairly simple. Getting the gospel right, however, you would think would be equally as simple.

But getting it wrong seems to be even simpler. People get the gospel wrong. And Paul is writing to this church because people have come into the church, false teachers, and they start sort of mishandling the gospel, adding to it things that shouldn't be there, messing around with it.

[6 : 54] And people end up believing this. And the question you must ask is, why are people so quickly ready to believe a false gospel? And the answer is fairly simple, because they don't know the gospel well enough to be able to tell the difference between the truth and error.

So people are led astray. People fail to understand the beauty of the gospel in all its simplicity because they're led astray by their own lack of knowledge concerning the gospel.

It's as simple as that. So the reason someone can get away with telling a lie to you is because you don't know what the truth is. Or you may know what the truth is partially, but not fully, not comprehensively.

And of course, somebody else can come along, mess around with that, and you end up believing additional things that aren't true, thinking that it is true. And you thought that it is true, not on purpose, but by sheer mistake, in that by doing this, you have been led astray by your own lack of understanding.

And this is one of the things that Paul is saying here to the church. So here's sort of a summary as we come into this. The church has experienced false teachers amongst them, preaching a false gospel.

[8 : 19] And Paul calls this the gospel, but then he quickly adds, it's not because it is a gospel, it's not because there is another gospel at all, but these false teachers have been telling you that it is a gospel.

He is then, in chapter 1, verse 6, absolutely amazed at this church that they are so quickly deserting the true gospel, that they are not able to get the gospel right.

Then in chapter 2, someone who you think would get the gospel right, the apostle Peter, is confronted to his face by Paul in front of everyone else because he is denying the gospel.

He just so happens to be denying the gospel through an act of table fellowship. He's not saying that Jesus isn't Lord, but his actions is declaring a denial of the gospel because he's sat at one table, he then goes to sit at another table, and we'll get onto that in a moment.

In short, the Galatians are a foolish people. They're foolish because they have come to believe that the gospel is what these false teachers say it is rather than what Paul said it was, clearly.

[9 : 37] These false teachers are saying that you must add to God's grace in order to be saved, that God hasn't done enough, that you have to do something else in order to be saved.

And that's not true. You don't have to do anything else. And yet, so many Christians can fall into this trap fairly quickly, that they must perform a certain work or certain works over a period of their life in order to have the full assurance of salvation to be truly saved.

The issue here is circumcision, that the Jews who have become Christians are now telling the other people who are not Jews but are Christians that they have to be circumcised.

And the thought alone is enough to put you off the gospel, to think that that has, you know, what man would want to go through that at the age of, let's say he's converted at 40 and then been told he has to go through this.

Well, that's a, to stomach that alone is a big deal. But they're so convincing that people have gone along believing them. That's not the only error, but it is, of course, one of the main ones here.

[10 : 52] Now, we may think that these type of mistakes are only made by the church of the past and they wouldn't be made of the church today. But it's very easy even to spot in the church today how many believe in salvation by grace plus works.

And when you point it out to them, they're not always sure what it is that you are pointing out to them. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone and not of works because the glory goes to God, the glory does not come to us.

Okay? To say that you add to your salvation, to say that you add to the work of Jesus, to say that Jesus' work was not enough is to rob God of the glory that he demonstrated at the cross and to give some of that glory to yourself to say, I've added to my way to heaven.

Now, if I can sort of say this in a slightly different way, and I'm going to use a friend of mine who's a Roman Catholic. He has about six children, six girls, and we've been friends for a long time.

And, of course, we talk about the things of God. We talk about the things of faith and grace because he loves talking about these things, and so do I, and it makes a good conversation. And he's confused as to whether or not I'm saved because I'm saying that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, not of works.

[12 : 25] And, of course, him being a good Roman Catholic saying, no, salvation is by grace through faith plus works. You must work. Now, I said I believe that faith without works is dead, that all faith must produce some kinds of work as in service to God in the church, service to God in the world, but those works do not make me righteous before God.

They don't add to my salvation. I'm already saved before I do them. Of course, his position is slightly different in that you have to do them in order to have the full assurance that you're actually saved.

So here's the problem that we have. It's a very simple problem which I point out to him all the time. I said, you have trouble over believing whether or not I'm saved, but I have no trouble whatsoever over believing whether or not you're saved because salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

So the difficulty you have with me is not the difficulty that I have with you, okay? Because God saves by grace alone through faith alone, I can believe that you're saved because it's not of your works.

However, you look at me, pastor of the church, and are confused. Should he even be there? What is he doing? So one of the realities of truly believing in salvation by grace alone through faith alone is that we have no trouble that God can save anybody, irrespective of who they are and where they are because we believe it's by grace alone through faith alone.

[13 : 58] Now, you may not have experienced this, but one of the things that you might have experienced growing up in a Baptist church, which is something that I didn't do, but it's something that I encountered as soon as I came into the Baptist church, is that most people believe by salvation, by grace alone through faith alone, or at least they think they do, until they come across an eight-year-old child who wants to be baptized.

And suddenly, the elders of the church are going, they're not ready. Well, what else are you looking for? What are you actually looking for? And suddenly, you think, oh, they believe by salvation, by grace alone through faith alone, but now they're looking for something else.

And this is where the creep or the error steps in. We want to be sure that a person is saved before we do anything.

But how sure can any of you be when you look at your friends who have sadly departed from the faith, even in this very congregation?

And yet they were baptized 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago, and now they're no longer with the Lord. That there is no work that can cement salvation.

[15 : 15] Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. And that is something which should be fairly easy to appreciate and understand, but which many people get confused over the moment they start applying it further down the line.

So we shouldn't think that as we listen to the message of Galatians, that wouldn't happen to us. We couldn't fall into the same trap as they do. We don't add anything to the gospel.

We don't put anything, we don't say that we're saved by grace through faith. We don't add anything on to the end of it. No, but there's quite a lot of people who add things on to the beginning of it when it comes to evangelism.

We need to counsel people into evangelism. We need to prepend it with counseling. We need to prepend it with bridge building. We need to prepend it with all these things. But what are you doing?

You're adding something before you get to the gospel on the front end where these are adding something to the gospel on the back end. Either the gospel is sufficient, either God's grace through Christ Jesus is enough, or it isn't.

[16 : 26] And that's the message of Galatians, that God doesn't need our help. He wants us to be willing postmen, not messing with the message, just delivering it.

He wants us to be His voice, not altering what we are told. He just wants us to say it as it is because it's God's word that makes a difference.

God approves of you in Christ Jesus. You don't need to look for somebody else's approval. You don't need for somebody else to come along and say, you have to do this before you can be accepted into my fellowship.

Well, I don't want to be in your fellowship. I want to be in God's fellowship, and I want to be in God's fellowship with everyone else who's in God's fellowship by grace alone through faith alone.

I'm never going to be enough to live up to your standards, but God, through His grace, makes me enough to live up to His. And that's one of the issues that we have when you start adding things to the gospel.

[17 : 30] Suddenly, you don't meet people's standards even though you meet God's, which seems unbelievably strange that people would even believe such a thing.

But it's true. So, let me spell it out. Are we saved by faith or works? Well, in this chapter that we've read, these few verses that we've read, Paul has got several questions that he asks of the church, but then before they have opportunity to answer, he's answered them for him like all good pastors should, I guess.

At least you've got to be able to provide an answer somewhere down the line. And the questions go something along this line, that if you could keep the law of God and be saved, then why aren't you?

If you could keep the law of God and be saved, then why aren't you saved? Isn't it the plain fact that by the very fact that you're not saved before God's grace, evidence that you could not keep his law and be saved?

Another question would be something along the lines of, but if you could be saved by works of the law, by something that you did, then what reason do you have for God giving his son into the world?

[18 : 47] Was God wasting his time in giving you Jesus if you could do it all by yourself? And the answer is, of course not. You cannot do it all by yourself. But the law isn't broken.

The problem's not with God's law. God's law is perfectly fine. The problem is with us. An illustration would be this, that if God's law was a ladder to God and righteousness, and all you had to do was climb to the very top to be righteous, the moment you began to climb this ladder, you would realize that the ladder isn't broken, but your legs are.

The issue is not the ladder. The issue is you. The issue is me. Okay? God sets before us a standard that we can't keep, and it's God's grace that takes us to the top.

Okay? Through no effort of our own. We're saved by grace through faith. God comes down to where we are and brings us up because we do not have the strength, we do not have the ability, we do not have the means of being able to get right with God on our own.

And so I thank God, and so do you, I'm sure, for the fact that the gospel is simple, that God, by his grace, through faith, brings us to him.

[20 : 01] It's not of works, on the prep end or on the back end. It's all of grace, not of works. So the problem is a simple one, and that is we can't save ourself.

The answer is a simple one. God's done it for us. But as Paul says here in this short bit of writing in verse 8, you know, back in the day before you were saved, you were enslaved to the things of the world.

You were enslaved to other types of God. But it was Christ that set you free. It was God's grace that set you free. You have come to know God, or rather, you are known by God.

You are known by God. You now belong to God. But this church, having been saved, and are saved, hence why he calls them brothers in verse 12, have decided to go back to a works righteousness.

So now you're dealing with not just people who aren't saved, thinking that they can only be saved by doing works. No, now you're dealing with people who are saved by grace through faith, but who have ended up believing that they must add to their grace in order to be right with God.

[21 : 18] And of course, that isn't the case. What happens when you believe in something like this? Well, the first thing that happens is that your freedom in Christ disappeared.

The gospel brings a freedom that you can only joy without conflicting demands. I don't know if you've ever read some of the Greek histories, you know, with all the Greek gods and what have you.

And, you know, if you wanted to go on a voyage across the sea, you had to make a sacrifice to the sea god because you wanted calm weather. Right? And if you wanted to cross land, you had to make a sacrifice to the land god because you wanted things to be well.

All of it. And what you have is you're worshipping a bunch of gods that are conflicting with one another. That, you know, in order, you know, people go to the beach and they go into the sea and they ask, you know, Mother Earth to keep them safe.

What you have is you have... The reason... One of the issues that you have with multiple gods is that none of them agree with each other. What you have with one god, the triune god of Scripture, who is above all and overall, even these false gods that people believe in, is you have no conflicting demands.

[22 : 37] The story is not conflicting. It's very, very simple. So in Christ Jesus, there are no conflicting demands. There's only freedom because God doesn't conflict with himself.

The person who belongs to Christ Jesus doesn't live a life of conflicting demands if indeed they put Christ Jesus first. But if they do put other things first before God, then of course they live a Christian life full of conflicting demands.

The worship of God is just one of those things that has to compete for time and attention in their life. And it often loses because of conflicting demands.

You cannot serve two masters. So let's not think that this isn't an issue for us today. It's a very real issue. So if we accept a faith of conflicting demands, we accept a faith where we destroy our own freedom.

We are then bound up to what others might expect or other organizations might expect. The question is this, who's the lawgiver in your life? Who is the one that you actually listen to and are directed by?

[23 : 50] You know, I teach my wife and my children often that they should only ever listen to me if my words sound like scripture. You know, if I'm saying things that they go, well, hang on a minute, that's not the way scripture's arrows pointing.

Right? I am now free to no longer to listen to you. Okay? Right? Because God comes before the husband. God comes before the wife. God comes before the children.

Right? If he doesn't, then you have a family full of conflicting demands. And the reason why families have conflicting demands in them is simply because they, while they appreciate God is first, when it actually comes to God being first, he isn't.

And it's very, very simple to spot. But of course, Paul then is saying this to a church and he has to point out to them, have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? No one wants the pastor's job because all the pastor is allowed to do is tell the truth.

And the pastor is fully aware that as he tells the truth to a church or to God's people who live lives of conflicting demands, even in his own family, one of the things that happens is that he becomes an enemy simply by telling the truth.

[25 : 10] You know, you're not my friend anymore. Okay, I can cope with it because I'm securing Christ Jesus. I can cope with being alone because I'm securing Christ Jesus. I can cope with that.

I have no insecurity there. But I feel the anguish for you that you're not where you ought to be before God. And you ought to feel the anguish for me if the roles were reversed, if the thing was the other way around.

So the moment you fall away from Christ Jesus, the moment you sort of add to Jesus and Jesus loses his first place, as it were, in your life, then you have a life of conflicting demands.

And Paul is saying to this church, look, I'm telling you the truth. I'm telling you for your own benefit, but have I become your enemy now? Verse 16.

Have I become your enemy by telling you the truth? Am I no longer your friend? Are we no longer in fellowship? I'm actually saying the very thing that causes fellowship, but you're breaking fellowship by thinking of me as an enemy when I'm actually saying what is the very best for you.

[26 : 20] And one of the issues that is coming out of Galatians here is that Paul has no right to tell the families of the church how they ought to be, other than how they ought to be according to the way God wants them to be.

Paul has no right to tell any individual how to live their life, other than the way God tells individuals how to live their life. And so what Paul is doing is he comes into the church, and of course, the parishioners are, you know, they've come with a loaded shotgun, right?

Let's shoot the messenger, right? Let's get rid of... Because how else do you deal with it? What, you know, when it gets too much, you just turn the light out.

When the room is messy, okay, when the rooms are messy and it needs tidying and you can't face it, you can't face that mess, what do you do?

Do you roll up your sleeves and go, no, let's give it a go? No, you shut the door, right? And you go and make yourself a cup of tea. Because some things are too much to take in the moment.

[27 : 30] Right? We all do it. And this is what's happening here. I've got so much to deal with, and this is how I'm going to deal with it. I'm going to turn the light off because I can't see it in the dark.

I'm going to shut the door because now that room is messy only on the other side. And when those type of behaviors happens, nothing ever gets dealt with.

Nothing ever gets dealt with. Things constantly remain undoubted, untidy. Another example would be of this, that in Ezekiel, Ezekiel is someone who's a prophet.

He has to speak God's words to God's people. And the elders of God's people come to Ezekiel asking to be counseled. They want to be counseled. And then God says to Ezekiel, as they are coming, be careful, because they have idols in their heart.

Ezekiel 14. They're coming to hear the truth, but be careful, they have idols in their heart. In other words, unless it conforms with what they want to hear, they're going to hear you and quickly move on.

[28 : 37] Right? Because they're coming with something specific that they want to hear. They have idols in their heart. In other words, they're not enjoying the freedom that God gives because they are bound by the lawgivers of others.

And this is what Paul is essentially saying, that these people who make much of you, these people who encourage you, not encourage you in Christ Jesus, not even necessarily encourage you in the right way, who make much of you, often do so because of relational issues.

They want something in return. They want perhaps to be thought well of by you. And so they make much of you so that in turn you would end up making much of them.

But Paul, who speaks the truth, becomes the enemy. Right? And that's the sad thing about it, that you have this courtship of friends that only exist because there's idols in their hearts.

But the moment someone comes in and says, here's the truth of freedom in Christ Jesus, then suddenly that person, you know, is seen as, you know, you don't, we don't want you around here.

[29 : 51] We want to move on. The point here is that freedom is only given by Jesus. Freedom has to be shaped by God. Freedom will never be shaped by someone else's view of you.

You will never enjoy freedom if you're constantly worried about what someone else is thinking about you. You will never enjoy the freedom in Christ that you can have and that is yours if you're constantly trying to live to someone else's law giving.

You will never enjoy the freedom in Christ without conflicting demands that you can have if you're constantly trying to live to someone else's standard. And the truth is, you don't have to.

You don't, it's only God, now God's standard is going to be higher than theirs, but it's, it's a standard that frees you. It's a standard where you won't wake up in the morning and go, am I good enough for an hour?

You've been made good enough by Christ Jesus. You've been made good enough by Christ Jesus. And that's Paul's point. Let me just say a little word about Peter then because this is perhaps not so much of an obvious one, but in chapter two, Paul has to oppose Peter to his face because Peter has denied the gospel.

[31 : 08] The way that he has denied the gospel is this way, that he's having table fellowship with Christians, Gentile Christians, and then circumcised Jewish Christians come along and they set up their pat lunch, their dinner on another table, and Peter moves tables.

Now, why would you do that? Why would you do that? Well, there's a distinction by separation, isn't there? That if I'm eating with this group, then what is that group going to think about me?

And then, so I'll shift over and I'll eat with that group because I'm less worried about what this group thinks about me than I am that group. And so your whole life becomes directed by what other people think.

And so Peter moves from eating, having table fellowship with Christians who are not circumcised, okay, to the Christians who are demanding circumcision, the circumcision party, as they're called.

And the reason he must do that is because he's more worried about what they will think about him if he sits on the other table than the other way around. Paul says, in doing that, he has denied the gospel.

[32 : 24] When you go and live under someone else's thoughts of you, you're denying the gospel. When you leave one group to go and sit under someone else, how's that denying the gospel?

People are confused about how that's done. It's a denial of the gospel because we're all one in Christ Jesus. God makes us one in Christ Jesus, not two.

There's not different standards in the body of Christ. And so by that simple action of moving from one group to another group, he has, Peter that is, denied the gospel.

A table fellowship, if you're at home, here's a practical example of how you might deny the gospel. Imagine you're sat around the table with your children and you're eating tea and you're drinking and mother or father, one of you sins.

Okay? And you sin in front of everyone. It would be wrong for you to take yourself upstairs, go into the bathroom or take yourself into the bathroom or into the bedroom or wherever it might be and then confess your sin.

[33 : 31] It would be wrong to do that because you've sinned in public. The place where it has to be put right is in public. Okay?

You can't go off and do it privately. It would be to deny the gospel. But the gospel is the evident practice of Christianity. Christianity. And so, if you've sinned around the table, then here, Paul confronts Peter around the table to his face openly so that it may be put right openly so that it's pointed out what's wrong.

And of course, if you're a mother or a father and you're sat on the table and you've sinned, then you need to ask forgiveness in that moment. It has to... And don't say, well, it takes a lot longer.

It takes as long to ask for forgiveness as it did to commit the sin. It's that easy. Will you forgive me? It's not difficult, is it, to do that?

But what happens is that we become offset to the gospel. We don't even realize it until someone points it out to us. And then we stop adopting, start adopting other positions and therefore deny the gospel even further.

[34 : 49] The gospel freedom is to fulfill the whole of our life, to influence us completely. Here's the exhortation then as we close. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone.

And that should be fairly straightforward. But it doesn't stop some from adding to it, either on the front end or the back end, by thinking something else is needed before people hear the gospel or something else is needed after people have responded to the gospel.

Both of those are a denial of the gospel. Both of those are false. These people may not think that they are doing it, but they may not think that they are doing it simply because they do not know the gospel well enough.

So they have been led into an error by their own assumptions or by somebody else's teaching without actually paying close enough attention to what God has actually said.

So not all people deny the gospel aggressively on purpose. Some deny it simply by their own ignorance to what the gospel actually teaches.

[36 : 06] Hence the need to hear it clearly. So we believe, hopefully, that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone all the time.

Not some of the time, not once in a while, but all the time. A man once told me that his mother used to say to him when he was growing up as he would profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, I'm a Christian mom, I'm a Christian mom, I believe, I believe Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead, I'm a Christian mom, that his mother would say to him for a long period of time over several years, well, we'll see, we'll see.

Well, what else was she looking for? And yet, what happens is you're educated in a church where we think that immature faith is not real faith.

Immature faith and mature faith, as long as it's real, is real. Faith grows. You can't have false faith, you can have no faith at all, okay, but faith, real faith, as it was in the words of God, can be immature, but that immaturity doesn't mean that it's not faith.

Okay? And mature faith is still faith. So it becomes very easy for parents, even for churches, if they're not careful, to destroy the faith of young children, even to destroy the faith of young believers by telling them that they're not ready for this or they're not ready for that.

[37 : 45] What else are we looking for? Why are we looking for something more than what God actually looks for? If we believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, alone, then what's the complication?

the gospel is about putting Jesus first. The gospel is about how you become free of conflicting demands because Jesus is Lord. The Christian doesn't suffer from conflicting demands.

The true believer who doesn't deny the gospel does not suffer from conflicting demands because Jesus is Lord. It's only those who are having trouble with the gospel who begin to suffer from conflicting demands.

There is no conflict in Christ Jesus. There is no conflict in the Godhead. There is no conflict in Christianity. So stay away from those who hinder the gospel.

Stay away from those who hinder the faith of yourself or your loved ones or your children by demanding that something else must be proven before their faith in God is proven.

[38 : 55] No, we're saved by grace alone through faith alone. In Christ Jesus alone. Not of works lest any man should boast.

We're never ready. We're never ready to be saved. Never ready. That's why it's grace through faith. Amen.