

Explore the Bible: True Gospel

August 15, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Sept. 2 focuses on Galatians 1:1-10.*

When we read the Apostle Paul's letters, we know he had an agenda. All of his writings had a purpose, and being the well-educated citizen that he was, his structure and arguments were no less purposeful. As we study his letter to the Galatians together, we will realize why his argument is so urgent.

To Paul, the gospel of Jesus Christ itself was at stake for this community of believers. Like today, there was a threat of people negatively influencing the clear good news of salvation. Paul's intention was to bring clarity and correction.

Ask your group: *How do we see the gospel threatened today?* In parts of the world, there is literal persecution; in other parts, philosophies and cultural ideas dilute the "true gospel." *Why do you think we still have this problem of outside forces combating the good news of Jesus Christ?*

Appointed by God (Galatians 1:1-2)

Paul usually opened his letters as he does here—aiming to defend his authority for writing the letter. Depending on the people and his influence, he spent the necessary effort giving his defense. *From what you read here, do you think his influence was in question? Why or why not?*

It is clear he is doing what some call "pulling the Jesus card," which means he is making the conversation more serious by attesting to divine involvement in his call. His authority was God-given. So, he was speaking

on behalf of not just himself, but also God and other believers.

When we have something important to say, how do we try to prove our authority? Why would we want to let listeners know that we speak on behalf of others also? For the apostle, it was to point to himself as the messenger from God to deliver the truth of the gospel. This was no small matter, and he was no small voice.

Through His Grace (Galatians 1:3-5)

Something to appreciate is that even though this letter contains a good deal of correction, Paul offers a “blessing” at both the opening and closing. This was both respectful and honoring, and it likely allowed the Galatians’ ears to be more open. Ask your group: *What affect does a “blessing” from someone have on you?*

Can you hear the strong sense of salvation language in his blessing? Since the gospel itself hinges on the reality of grace, it is no coincidence Paul offers “grace and peace.” Consider discussing what grace is (offering a clear definition), and why Paul needed to offer “grace” to these people first and foremost.

“Rescue” is another word for salvation. If someone is struggling to swim to the surface of the water, the one who helps that person is literally their “savior” or “rescuer.” Here, Paul points to Jesus as the lifeguard who gave himself to save those drowning in sin. Only his saving can result in both grace and peace.

Distorted by Some (Galatians 1:6-10)

With the greeting concluded, it is time to get to the important business. Taking the “lifeguard” imagery mentioned above, the issue is that after

being “saved,” these rescued ones were taking their eyes off the one who saved them. Essentially, they were abandoning the lifeguard who saved their life!

Notice how Paul pointed out that false teachers were presenting “a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all.” While there are many types of good news, there is still only one overall *Good News* of salvation. To differ from this leads us to issues that discredit faith and lead us back into the roaring waves.

When standing against “other gospels,” what challenges do we face? Believing in one way to salvation is seen as narrow-minded, yet that is what Jesus declared about himself. Ask your group: What do we risk for believing Jesus is the only way to salvation? What do we risk for discrediting Jesus as the only way?

Conclusion

In verse 10, Paul points to his ambitions by declaring he is more concerned with pleasing God than people. Living for God means we live to follow and please him. This means our “fear” of others should be overwhelmed by our desire to be true disciples. But this is more easily said than done.

Consider summarizing the remainder of the chapter. It is important to see how Paul recognized he was once a strict Jew who opposed this faith that he now espoused. Just as he would not return to the grace-less way of life, he would encourage the Galatians to follow his lead.

To combat the issues we face today with the true gospel being diluted, it would be good to identify cultural ideas that oppose our view. *Why do these counter-gospel ideas gain strong followings? What do we need to do to remain true to the only gospel of Jesus Christ?*

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