



**Looking Inwards** (15 mins)  
*Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however: 'It's the sharing that enables the caring!')* for:

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?



**Looking Outwards** (15 mins)  
*Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

- Thanksgiving?
- Prayer?
- Encouragement?
- Support in any way?

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HG99: Pauls Letter To The Galatians  
**Bad News About The Good News**

Galatians 1:1-10

Home Group Study Notes

14 September 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN  
ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION  
**BEFORE THE MEETING!**

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.*



**Welcome** (10 mins)  
*Ice Breaker*

Share one experience and/or event (whether on holiday; at home; or in a newspaper, magazine, book or on TV) which has had an impact on your Christian life over the summer.



**Looking Upwards** (10 mins)  
*Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...



## Looking Upwards (40 mins) Bible Study

Read the text for this study, and any references given, then answer the following questions. You may find it helpful to listen to the sermon and/or read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, your answers with your Home Group and, remember, these questions are only a guide to start your discussions.

**1:** All of us know someone like 'Joe Bloggs' who says: *'It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere?'* How do you respond to such statements?

**2:** Paul describes himself as an apostle (1:1) what does this mean? You might also like to discuss whether there are 'apostles' like Paul in today's church and, if so, how and why?

**3:** Discuss what you understand by the words 'grace and peace; (1:3). How do you explain how they summarise Paul's gospel of salvation?

What sort of person would do that? Well, sadly most of us would. That is what we are like by nature and so we make up 'do good' religions to satisfy that quest for *self*-justification. There are so called Christian versions of it and non-Christian versions and do you know what the apostle Paul says of those who promote them to get to God? He says they are, quite literally, *damned* liars. They have turned the Good News of the Gospel into Bad News. And those people are in:

**3) A Divinely Cursed Situation:** *Vs8-9: 'But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!'* Paul is calling down a solemn curse which will result in the eternal damnation of *anyone* who teaches that people can be saved other than by receiving God's loving forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ *alone*. Paul would wish *himself* damned rather than do this. Paul is not having a bad hair day - he is uncompromisingly blunt because he actually cares.

Why? Firstly, because other so called gospels and religions lead to the death of people. Let me explain what I mean. Some of you will have seen the classic film starring Orson Wells called the 'Third Man.' It is set in post war Vienna, which, to put it mildly, is pretty grim. The place has been devastated by the war, things are in chaos, morality is lax and disease is rife. This provides an ideal breeding ground for the black market. One such racketeer is the main character played by Orson Wells, Harry Lime. There's a scene in which an investigative journalist enters a hospital and sees children lying row upon row in beds in terrible agony. Some are clearly dying, others are seriously ill. Why? Because Harry Lime and others like him have made a profit by selling watered down penicillin vaccine – and this is the result. How do you think that journalist felt towards the black marketers? Did he shrug his shoulder and say 'It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere?' Of course not. He is *angry*.

When people water down the only medicine there is which can deal with our most fundamental problem, our estranged relationship with God caused by our sin so that people drift off into a Christless eternity, then our reaction should not be any less than the apostle Paul's. People's eternal destiny is at stake. If the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Pope or Paul Carr preaches another Gospel other than the one the apostle Paul preached, they will rightly be eternally damned; for they would have done the cruellest thing any human being could do: and that is to stop people from knowing the love of God in Jesus and sending them into a dark eternity with no hope.

Secondly, other so called gospels lead to the dishonouring of the Lord Jesus. You see, to say we must *do* things in order to be saved implies that Jesus on the cross hasn't done enough, that it was deficient in some way. It means instead of him receiving all the glory and all the thanks for leaving the beauty of heaven to hang on the beams of a cross covered with the filth of our sin to save us, he has to share it, he must thank *us* for doing our part. And rightly Paul will have none of that, as he says at the end of the letter 'May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

**Conclusion:** Now, all of this may be new to you and may even sound a little offensive. But think of it like this: if it were even remotely possible for God to accept you and me on the basis of our being decent and religious, do you not think that he would have done so? Does not the fact that he sent his Son Jesus whom he has loved from all eternity to bleed and be broken on the cross mean there was no other way you sin and mine could be dealt with? Here is the medicine, there is no other, and God pleads with you to take it before it is too late. Become a Christian and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as rescuer, ruler and friend. And if you are a Christian then rejoice in the fact that God could not give more for you than he already has, for if you have his Son the Lord Jesus then you have everything: And that is not Bad News, it is Good News about the Good News! Don't keep it to yourself.

Everything that he teaches about Christianity which is *right* he learnt from the apostles in Jerusalem, but everything he teaches about Christianity which is *wrong* he has made up himself.' That is why he tries to make Christianity easy, all a matter of faith, not religious works.'

Paul launches a pre-emptive attack on such slander. *Vs1: Paul, apostle - sent not from men nor by man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead.*' For a start he declares himself 'apostle' – it may not even be 'an apostle'- but straight 'apostle'. Why? Because the risen Jesus who met him on the Road to Damascus commissioned him to be *the* apostle to the Gentiles, that is the non-Jews. So he wasn't sent by men like Peter, James and John back in Jerusalem or by any human being, his was a *divine* appointment, coming straight from Jesus himself 'raised from the dead' and approved by God the Father. So what Paul says is not a matter of his own personal opinion, but divine revelation.

The fact is if it weren't for Paul most of the New Testament would be missing. He is *our* apostle especially since most of us here this morning are not of Jewish descent so we should treasure what Paul has to say because Jesus sent him especially for *us*. What is more, you can't knock Paul's motives either as being a mere man pleaser, hence *vs10: 'Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.'*

Paul uses some pretty intemperate language which is not going to endear him anyone. He hardly comes across as a man pleaser or a religious chameleon who changes his message to fit his audience. Paul would have made a great northerner in the fact that he called a spade a spade! The fact is you can't please God whilst trying to please men, because the Gospel message is offensive to natural man. It tells him that he is not good enough for God - and never will be. In God's sight there is no difference between the crack dealer and the car dealer, the robber and the Rotarian - all such lives offend him if they are lived outside his rule and God is angry. And somehow that anger has to be turned away otherwise we are in very serious trouble aren't we? Who wants to die and face an angry God? I know I don't. So is there *any* good news? It comes in the form of:

**2) A Divinely Focused Message:** *Vs3-4: 'Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father...'* What we need, and what God so wonderfully supplies, is a rescue not a religion. And what a rescue and at what a cost! Paul says that God the Father, gave his Son Jesus Christ for our sins. Just picture it for a moment. God is on his throne. You are on the earth. And between you and God, suspended between you and heaven, is Christ on his cross. You sins have been placed on Jesus. God, who punishes sin, releases his rightful anger on *your* offences, *your* mistakes and *Jesus* received the blow. Since Christ is between you and God, you don't. The sin is punished but you are safe, *so long* as you remain in the shadow of the cross. But the moment you decide to leave there and strut around pointing to what you have done, how good you are, how religious you have been, then you have in effect just signed your own death warrant. You take the blow yourself.

And notice how kind God has been in doing this for you. He gave *his* Son. Would you do that? Would you offer the life of your child for someone else? There are those for whom I would give my life. But if you ask me for a list of those for whom I would be willing to kill one of my children, then the sheet would be blank. But not God's sheet. Your name is there, as is mine - for God so loved the *world* that he gave his one and only Son. Now tell me: what sort of person will turn to the God who has done such a wonderful thing, whose heart was broken on the cross, whose blood was spilt and say: 'Keep it. I don't want it. I will not only make my own way to heaven thank you very much, because the one thing I will not accept is charity from God or anyone else.'

**4:** Paul attributes the problem in Galatia to a group of troublemakers (agitators) within the churches. What were they doing and why was it so damaging? Can you think of similar situations in today's church? What can you learn from Paul's example?

**5:** Paul insists that 'there is only one gospel and that this gospel does not change (1:6&7)'. How might we recognise the true gospel?

**6:** This sermon was entitled: 'Bad News about the Good News.' How might some people turn the 'Good News into Bad News?' How might you best share the 'Good News about the Good News' with others?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG99: The Letter To The Galatians **Bad News About The Good News**

Galatians 1:1-10

Home Group Sermon Notes

14 September 2014 - Revd Paul A. Carr

**Introduction:** Let me tell you a story about Joe Bloggs! We all know him! Joe says: 'It doesn't matter what you believe, so long as you are sincere.' He is a liberal minded, tolerant kind of bloke. He goes to church every Sunday, but he would be the last person in the world to impose his faith on anyone. 'I'm sure we will all find our own way to God in the end,' he confidently affirms. 'The Hindu has his way, the Muslim has his way, I have mine and you have yours. After all, all roads lead to God don't they? I mean, how could God possibly be so intolerant as to let only Christians into heaven? No, it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere!' And there is no denying that Joe's point of view is immensely attractive, especially in our modern world where mosques and temples vie with churches and chapels on the High Street and when religious intolerance of any kind must not be tolerated. It doesn't matter what you believe so long as you are sincere!' But there is such a thing as being sincerely wrong.

Adolph Hitler was sincerely wrong about ethnic cleansing and his beliefs destroyed the lives of millions of people. Suicide bombers, such as the 9/11 or July 7<sup>th</sup> bombers, were sincerely wrong in their belief that they were carrying out the will of Allah. Saddam Hussain was sincerely wrong about genocide being the solution to quelling a rebellious people. Osama Bin Laden, and others like him, was sincerely wrong in his belief that terrorism is the answer to the ills of the world. The Islamic State are sincerely wrong in thinking that public executions will convert the heathens to their thread of Islam. The fact is it *does* matter what you believe regardless of whether or not you are sincere, especially if the truth and the lives of other people is at stake.

**Setting The Scene:** So here we are in southern Turkey, an area known as Galatia. It is some 15-18 years since Jesus was crucified and the breathtaking message that he has been raised from the dead and is now alive reigning in heaven has begun to sweep through the Roman Empire like wild-fire. And one man whom God greatly used to spread the Good News of Jesus was a former hater of Christianity and a Jewish elitist - Paul. In fact, as he travelled throughout Galatia, in the power of the Holy Spirit, he would argue the Christian case and people would be converted and they would meet together to worship Jesus. These new converts would tell their friends about how they too could enjoy the life changing experience of sins forgiven and a personal relationship with God based on trust/faith. And so the movement began to grow: rich people, poor people, slaves, noble men, Jew, non-Jew, black white (3:28) it didn't matter. The only entry requirement into the saving reign of God was trusting in God's son, Jesus, as rescuer, ruler and friend.

But you can be sure of this: wherever the liberating message of a free relationship with God through Jesus is offered, there will be others coming along behind trying to replace it with a religion of bondage. Whereas the Gospel breaks down barriers, religion erects them. Liberty is exchanged for law; mercy is replaced with merit and the result is that people, who sincerely believe they are going to heaven because they are not that bad, are in fact heading straight to hell because they are not that good. You see, sincerity is not the issue, salvation is.

That is why Paul writes as he does with such urgency and passion. This letter does not include Paul's usual greeting of prayer and blessing for the saints, it is straight down to business vs6-7: '*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel - which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*' Paul speaks of these Christians 'deserting' and that's because to abandon the Christian faith is not to abandon a philosophy but a person: God 'the *one*' who called you', it is an act of personal betrayal. Paul says he is 'astonished', he can hardly believe it is happening, but it is. And it has happened so *quickly* too. The problem is, as he says: 'Some people are throwing you into confusion - literally agitating you - and are guilty of turning the Good News of the Gospel into Bad News.

As we will see from the rest of the letter, a group of Jewish teachers, who also *claim* to be Christian, have come in and insist that in addition to believing in Jesus they must also become Jewish and keep the Jewish law, get circumcised (which, I can imagine, would reduce the number of adult male converts significantly!) and keep the Jewish ritual. In other words, salvation is *earned* as a right not given as a gift. What is more, to keep in with God you had to live by rules and regulations. When the Bible is added to and denied, people are being eternally lost as a result. Jesus says, 'I am the way, the truth and the life no one comes to the Father except by me' others say, he is *a way*, but you can get to God through Islam or Hinduism too. The Bible says: 'Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved' but the Christian church often add on a bit more don't they?

I read 'Inferno' by Dan Brown during my holidays. He certainly likes tackling controversial subjects doesn't he? Jesus marrying Mary Magdalen (The Da Vinci Code); corruption in the Catholic Church (Angels and Demons); Freemasonry (The Lost Symbol); and now Dante's famous poem the Divine Comedy and the emphasis on the seven deadly sins of: Pride, Envy, Anger, Gluttony, Lust, Greed and Sloth (Laziness). Dante actually wrote a trilogy of books, not one: Inferno/Hell, Purgatory and Paradise. When Dante's Divine Comedy was published in the 14C it had an amazing impact on peoples religious habits and many turned/returned to the church to find their salvation - fearful of all that Dante wrote about in his vision of hell. Remember his famous line: *Abandon hope all you who enter here.*

This poem changed the way the (Catholic) church preached the gospel - playing on the fear of those who read Dante's poem. Rather than faith being the free gift of God, it became a faith of rules and regulations. The Good News of the gospel became: 'Attend mass, go to confession and you *might* be saved eventually - after paying off indulgences to be absolved from purgatory and buy salvation. If you know church history, you will know this led to Martin Luther's 95 Theses (31/10/1517) and the beginning of the Reformation which reaffirmed the belief that salvation couldn't be bought but was the free gift of God through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

What happened in Galatia and the 14C is still happening today. People turn the Good News of the Gospel into Bad News. There are people queuing up to rob you of your freedom in the Lord Jesus, and there are those who are wanting to stop you knowing that freedom if you are not yet a Christian - and it is all done in the name of religion. We looked at this in some depth a couple of years ago when we studied the book of Colossians. So, how does Paul counter these false teachers with their false Gospel both then and now? Firstly, we are introduced to:

**1) A Divinely Appointed Messenger:** These false teachers have been attacking Paul, questioning his apostolic credentials. An apostle is someone who has been commissioned and sent by the risen Lord Jesus himself and so carries his authority. So what an apostle says in the name of Christ is to be taken as if Christ himself were saying it. But 'Paul was not one of the original twelve', the false teachers would claim.