



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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HG100: Pauls Letter To The Galatians
The Origins Of Paul's Gospel

Galatians 1:11-24

Home Group Study Notes

28 September 2014 - Pauline Woolnough



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

With the never ending barrage of facts and opinions in the media, social and otherwise, how do you sort out who and what to believe. Does it all make you more skeptical or gullible?



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: Some in the Galatian church were being influenced by “agitators,” they were distorting the gospel and leading people away from God. What or who are the agitators in your life that pull you away from God?

2: The Galatian church had been influenced by Paul who preached the true gospel and he led them towards God. Who are the people in your life that have influenced you and pulled you towards God and how did they do it?

3: The agitators wanted to change the gospel and add things to it. Are there ways that we change the gospel and are there any things that we add to it?

The extremist may attract some who are alienated from the culture they live in but in most cases it only serves to help people form the opinion that religion is bad, that it leads to conflict and it is something to be avoided. We need to be people who will listen to others and respect others views and their freedom to have those views but we also need to be prepared to share what we believe when someone condescendingly brushes aside our beliefs with an air of indifference and mild attempt at humouring us. When someone tells you that they don't believe in God, or that crystals or cards can predict your future or that mankind was introduced to earth by an alien who landed here 75 million years ago, or that religion is a crutch and that science has all the answers, be prepared to ask them what exactly it is that they believe and why they believe it, asks them what evidence they have for their beliefs and how has it changed their lives? Make sure that if they question (or dismiss) your views and beliefs, you question theirs and ask how they know their views are true. Then go on to share the truth, the gospel that Paul preached and defended.

The Truth That Changes Us: By listening to others and having discussions you will most likely discover that your understanding of the truth is greater than theirs is, because your truth affects every aspect of your life, your truth involves getting to know the Person of Jesus Christ through the transforming work of His Holy Spirit. Most unbelievers never really take time to think through life's big questions until tragedy strikes or its too late, they never fully work out what it is they believe in and the “*truth*” behind it or how it should affect their lives and in most cases they are unable to give impartial evidence for the truth of their beliefs, yet they require us Christians to. Ultimately our biggest advocate of the truth and the thing that people can't argue with is the impact that knowing Jesus has had on our lives. How has becoming a Christian changed us? Paul knew that he had seen the risen Christ he knew he had been commissioned to preach; and the only way he could convince others of this fact was to point to its effects. There has to be evidence of change. Our salvation does not depend on our actions or our service but these things are products of it. Out of the gift of salvation comes a gratitude that leads to a desire and a willingness to change and to serve.

Jesus never told Paul to go and study under the direction of the apostles instead he went to Arabia then he returned to Damascus. It was only after 3 years when Paul had had time to reflect, pray, listen and be taught by the Holy Spirit that his gospel had taken shape and he went up to Jerusalem to get to know Peter. During his fifteen-day stay in Jerusalem the only other apostle he saw was James, the Lord's brother. A fortnight stay with Peter could hardly support his opponents claim that he was a secondhand disciple who had been taught and trained by the Jerusalem apostles or that he had worked alongside them, he supports this by saying that even the churches in Judea had not heard of him, he was “*personally unknown to them,*” v22. Had he studied under the apostles these would have been the very churches that he would have served and ministered to, but when they did hear of him they praised God for him because the one who formerly persecuted them was now preaching the faith. v23.

Conclusion: Those who tried to discredit Paul did not want to deny all his teachings but they did want to change them and add to them. Faced with his dramatic story which could be checked for accuracy and truth they could only conclude that his amazing change of heart which turned him from a persecutor into an apostle could only be explained by his encounter with Christ and subsequent commission from Him. Paul never chose to change, at the time he would have thought he had nothing to gain by his conversion. The change came about because God took the initiative. That being so Paul's authority and his apostleship was not “*from man, nor by man*” v.1. His gospel was the one true gospel because as v.12 says he “*did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, rather I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*” Paul was an independent witness to the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel that we believe is not a human invention, it has nothing to do with human opinion, it is not open to being changed to fit our needs or to please others. As C.S. Lewis said “Christianity must be from God, for who else could have thought it up!”

His was a background that he would have been ashamed of and one he may well have preferred to have forgotten or kept quiet but he reminds them for this reason, he wants them to know that something astonishing happened to him in order for him to have changed so much.

Paul - Before and After: Paul had not been going around half heartedly being bit nasty to Christians, calling them names, pointing out they were in the wrong, he was trying to exterminate them, he wanted the new church completely destroyed and if that meant that Christians had to die Paul considered it a necessary evil. He never would have been attracted to the new message, he despised it, he wasn't charmed by the apostles in Jerusalem, they were his enemies, it took a lot more than that to make Paul see the light. It was Jesus Himself, alive from the dead who intervened and met Paul on the road to Damascus and said, "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me.*" Acts 9.4. It was Jesus and only Jesus who could have brought about this change in him and he tells the Galatians all this to make them understand that it was completely unthinkable that he would have been promoted to the rank of apostle by any human effort even with help from the great Peter, James or John themselves. There is only one explanation for the change in Paul and that is Christ Himself, and that is why they and we should believe Paul.

The World's Truth: Everywhere you look in the media at least, people are expressing opinions, often trying to get us to buy something. If you use a particular face cream you will look 20 years younger...no you wont, I've tried them. Shed pound with the latest fad diet... you might but you'll put it all back on again as soon as you stop. Read the latest self improvement best seller and your life will be transformed... highly unlikely, and for many Christians who believe in a prosperity gospel that says the Lord wants us all, especially in the west, to be materially rich and prosperous, tell that to the Christians who have lost everything and are afraid for their lives in places like Iraq and Syria. In a world that is rife with opinions about the good life, the truth matters. There are a lot of conflicting and strange views in the world that people believe and invest in. Search how many religions there are in the world today and you will find that there are roughly 4200 that people follow, there are 21 main religions, Christianity being the most dominant with 2.1 billion believers and there are approx 1 billion people who say that they do not believe in any religion. We need to know what we believe and be able to communicate that with others. More than ever before, today, we need to be the kind of people for who truth matters because what we believe is as much under threat and attack as it was in Paul's day.

We live in a world that is less concerned with absolute truth. Postmodernism tells us that there is no absolute truth, what is true for you may not be true for me and we run the risk of seeming arrogant if as Christians we claim to know *the* truth, surely all roads lead to God. On the one hand we have those who are just not interested in the gospel, they don't see the relevance in the 21st century but they are happy for you to believe whatever you want because for them one belief or opinion is as good as the next, "*you believe what you want and I'll believe what I want,*" but when we actually get down to it what do they really believe? For a lot of people Jesus is someone they may possibly have heard about in Sunday school, maybe at a visit to church at Christmas or Easter, Christianity is something they may have fleetingly studied along with other world religions in an RE lesson at school but for most adults real life doesn't have much to do with questions of truth and they are more likely to be turned off by the many different opinions expressed about the gospel in the media. For many its easier to take bits from different belief systems and create a gospel that suits their needs and lifestyle and it would never occur to them to check and test their ideas and beliefs against scripture.

There are others who would force their beliefs on us, extremists who aggressively tell us that theirs is the one true religion and who would wish to take away the freedom to express ours. They are prepared and not only willing to die for their beliefs but they are also willing to kill others for it.

4: Paul's letter was written to confront the people and bring them back to the truth. Has anyone ever confronted you when you went astray? Have you ever confronted anyone yourself?

5: Paul had been a cruel persecutor of the church yet an encounter with Christ changed him into the great apostle. Who are the persecutors that we should be praying for today?

6: What are the qualities that you look for in someone in authority?



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



HG100: Paul's Letter To The Galatians *The Origins Of Paul's Gospel*

Galatians 1:11-24

Home Group Sermon Notes

28 September 2014 - Pauline Woolnough

Introduction: Paul knew that the message he preached had been given to him by God through his revelation of Christ, there was nothing man made about the message he preached, it was God-sent. He also knew that he had been given the authority to preach the message by God, he had been “*set apart from birth*” by God, v15. Both message and authority came from God. For Paul these two things were inseparable. Many of the new converts to Christianity were Jews, they didn't have a problem with Jesus being the Messiah, nor did they have a problem with Gentiles becoming Christian but they would have been easily persuaded by those we will call agitators to believe that Paul had either got it wrong or omitted to tell them that the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament still needed to be observed and of course new believers had to be circumcised, and they would have claimed to have James, Peter and John as their authority. Judaism was rooted in tradition, and it had been part of their lives and history for generations, its what they knew and were comfortable with and its what made them special and set them apart from other people and when Gentiles started joining the Church without first becoming Jews, some became afraid that their religious traditions and faith would be destroyed.

Religious traditions can be helpful in keeping families and communities together. But traditions are fallible because they are manmade and can at times contradict Scripture. Jesus Himself pointed this out in Mark 7:3-13. (See also Matt 15.6). One of the reasons why the Jewish leaders demanded that Jesus be crucified, was because he rebuked them for placing their traditions above the Word of God. People say that religion is the cause of a lot of wars but it's usually cultural differences and traditions that lead to hostility and in many cases war. Blind loyalty to tradition can lead to problems when people afford them too much importance and in some instances want to enforce their religious traditions on others. We see it happening today where those with extreme religious views want to impose their ways on others with more moderate views. Paul was planting new churches and telling converts that they didn't need to be circumcised nor did they have to keep the feasts. Was he just after the popular vote? Was he just making the new faith easy for people. Who should they believe? How would they know who was right? How could Paul convince them that what he had told them in the first place was what they should believe? There are 2 big issues being challenged here. Paul's authority and the truth about the origins of the gospel.

Paul's Authority: We have to be grateful for Paul's strong character and the lasting power of his revelation with Christ which gave him the strength to oppose what was probably becoming the popular views of the new Christians. His encounter with Jesus was so real and life changing that it sustained and motivated him to stay true to his beliefs and challenge any hint of incorrect teaching of the gospel. There was only one gospel. There *is* only one gospel that is true and for each and every one of us it is important that we get it right. Paul did not invent the gospel, he says “*he received it by revelation from Jesus Christ.*” v12.

We may have to ask ourselves at times is, - are we believing in some manmade concoction that can at times make it easy for us to believe and at other times make it extremely hard for us to adhere to, or are we staying true to the gospel of Christ that Paul preached?

His first 3 words in his letter reasserts his authority, he starts by saying-“*Paul an apostle,*” v1- he is saying that he is just as much an apostle as Peter not because of any associations with the disciples but because he has seen the risen Christ. His gospel is as true as Peter's because he didn't receive it second hand from anyone, he received it from Christ Himself, God himself set Paul apart from birth, Christ Himself chose to appear to him and to commission him to take his gospel and preach it to the Gentiles. In his letter to the Romans Paul identifies himself and his gospel like this: “*Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God.*” (1.1). If Paul wasn't an apostle, then he had no claim to authority or the truth and if the gospel he preached was of human origin then he would lose the right to be called an apostle.

Truth Matters: Elvis Presley said, “*Truth is like the sun. You can shut it out for a time, but it ain't goin' away.*” The truth is not invented it is discovered, even before Newton discovered it, gravity existed. Truth is not restricted by boundaries, it is transcultural. $2+2=4$ no matter when or where you live, its a fact, and it is true for all people, in all places at any time. Our beliefs about the truth may change but truth itself doesn't. There was a time when we used to believe that the world was flat but it was only our belief about the earth that changed when we discovered it was round. The earth itself and the truth about it didn't change. Truth exists independently of anyone's knowledge of it and Paul was determined that it was the truth that the new young church received and followed. For Paul the truth mattered and so it should for us because at times there appears to be a shortage of it in today's culture where thousands of unsupported opinions pass for the gospel in the media and literature. Movements such as the New Age offers something for everyone to believe in and follow and in some instances embraces honesty, integrity, love, peace, etc. but it wants to do it without the One true God. It prefers a god of its own making and one made in its own image that will behave on its own terms, but why believe Paul, especially when what he was offering seemed too easy, there must be a catch, it all sounded a bit too good to be true. Surely those who encouraged incorporating into the new faith all those traditions and ceremonies that had always been important to the Jewish people, had it right. Why believe Paul?

Verses 13–24 form the basis of Paul's argument for the truth of his apostleship and his gospel. V13 Paul says “*For you have heard of my former life in Judaism.*” Information about Paul was common ground and would easily have been available to anyone wanting to do some background checks on him. This was now his testimony and his argument for the truth because what in effect he was saying was this - “*look at me and see the transformation in me brought about by the Lord Jesus Christ.*” Nothing else could have brought about such a spectacular transformation in anyone. He was one of the most rigorous Pharisees of his day. He would have been known and feared by those of the new faith but he had gone from one of their most zealous of persecutors, to their most enthusiastic converts and advocate. He had gone from one who was ready to kill Christians, to one who was ready to *be killed* as a Christian. Before his encounter with Jesus he had hated everything about the Christian message, it was a threat to everything he stood for but after meeting Christ he did a complete about turn.

We know Paul as the great apostle, author of 2/3 of the NT, we study his teachings, yet before his encounter with Christ he was not a nice man. Few could match his religious passion and fervour or his intolerance for Christ and his followers. He describes his life before his conversion, telling how he “*intensely persecuted*” the church, he “*tried to destroy it*” he was “*zealous for the traditions of his fathers.*” Paul ravaged the church. Acts 9.1 says he was “*breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples,*” throwing men and women into prison.