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# Session 1: Free!

## Bible Passages

Galatians 1:1-10

## Brief Notes

This is a passionate and urgent letter from Paul, probably written to churches in southern Turkey such as Iconium, Lystra and Derbe, which he had planted only about a year earlier. You can read about that in Acts 13 and 14. These young churches are being messed up by some teachers (probably the same as those mentioned in Acts 15:1) who were insisting on circumcision as necessary to be full members of the church. That may seem an odd and obsolete debate now, but the underlying issues are profoundly relevant to us still.

## Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (vv.1-5)

An apostle was someone commissioned and sent with a message. Epaphroditus was an apostle of the church in Philippi (Phil.2:25, though the NIV there translates the word as messenger), sent by the church, bringing a message from the church. But Paul insists he was not merely an apostle of the church in Antioch, or wherever, but rather an apostle of Jesus Christ. He spoke Christ's word to them, with all the authority of "Jesus Christ and God the Father". If we have red letter Bibles, Paul would insist this letter should be in red: through him we hear Christ's word to us.

His message is not only from God, it is about God - what he has done through the Lord Jesus

Christ - and it is for God's glory. "Grace and peace" is not simply a formulaic greeting, it encapsulates the blessings of the Gospel which come to us through what Christ's death on the cross. There he bore our sins, so that no longer do we belong to this doomed present age, for he has rescued us and brought us into his eternal kingdom.

## **Paul's Gospel is the Only Gospel (vv.6-10)**

Today Paul would be encouraged to say of these false teachers "We have our differences, but there's lots we can affirm together", but clearly Paul sees these differences as fundamental. Their "different Gospel" is actually "no Gospel". It will be to their ruin, and it threatens to ruin these churches as they throw these young Christians "into confusion" and lead them away from the grace of Christ. These Christians certainly wouldn't have thought they were abandoning God, they were seeking to be more scrupulous in their obedience, but Paul warns them that to move away from his Gospel is to move away from God (v.6). The strength of Paul's language is an indication of the severe danger he sees them to be in, a danger of which they were it seems unaware. We too might be slow to recognise teaching that is leading us away from the grace of Christ and the freedom that is ours in Christ, and yet Paul's words underline the seriousness of this warning.

Verse 10 is presumably answering those who would suggest that Paul had left out the demands of the Law to make his message more palatable, but quite clearly the tone of Paul's words shows that he is not concerned about trying to make people like him. It is God he serves and God he seeks to please. Actually it is the legalist who typically is motivated by trying to win the approval of others, and the licentious person who seeks simply to please themselves: legalism and license are twin dangers Paul warns us of in this letter, both reflecting a misunderstanding of the Gospel. A good test of whether we have truly grasped grace and are living in the grace of Christ is whether we can echo these words – whether our desire is to please God.

## **Discussion Questions**

- Having read the passage, why do you think it might be good for us to be studying this letter?
- What does it mean to be an apostle?
  - Whose word does Paul bring to us?
- How then should we listen to what he writes?
- What do vv.1-5 tell us about Paul's message?
- How would you describe Paul's tone in vv.6-10?
  - Why do you think he speaks in this way?
- What is he saying about the Gospel he preached?
- What is he saying about the gospel others preached?
- What is his warning to those who teach another Gospel?
- What is his warning to those who are taken in by another Gospel?
- When we think of people turning away from the Gospel today, where typically might they turn?
- What is striking about where these Galatians are being tempted to turn?

(If people are unfamiliar with the letter then they could look ahead to eg 3:2-3; 5:2-4)

- How do these verses help us spot distortions of the Gospel today?
- Why do you think he says verse 10?
- In this letter Paul will warn of two kinds of distortions of the Gospel – legalism (adding Law to grace) and license (understanding grace to mean the Law doesn't matter). What tends to be the motivation underlying legalism and license? (ie who are we seeking to please?)
- What does this verse suggest is a good test of whether we have truly understood grace and are living in grace? Why is that so?

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