



This Sunday we began a new series in Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia, looking particularly at 1v1-10. On noting Paul's strong tone and lack of prayerful thanksgiving, we observed that it is tempting to assume a letter such as this isn't very relevant to us as we can't imagine giving up on the gospel. However, this book is not a museum piece. If there was a chance the Galatian believers could give up their faith, surely there is a chance that we could too. Let's listen humbly.

1 – The gospel you heard (v1-5)

Even though he writes within a well-established ancient letter writing formula, Paul drips the gospel in from the word go. He emphasises that he writes as an apostle – someone sent by God, not by men (v1). He reminds them that he is backed up by many other believers (v2). He reminds them that the gospel message is all about Jesus the Christ who gave himself up, died and was raised according to God's will (v1, 4). He reminds them at that at its heart the gospel is the story of a rescue mission, using a graphic term to describe how we were ripped from the jaws of judgment by Christ's sacrificial saving work. The Scriptures are full of rescue imagery for the gospel is the story of God's great rescue mission. As Christians we are rescued people.

2 – The danger of deserting it (v6-10)

Paul writes in strong terms in these verses because these Christians are in danger of deserting the gospel – of turning their backs on it. And to turn your back on God's gospel message, is to turn your back on God himself (v6). For the gospel is more than a set of words, it is a life-changing 'take it or leave it' offer of the gift of God's rescue. We can't have God without what he has said and done.

Paul tell us little of who was spreading the new message the Galatian Christians were believing, and nothing of the content of their message. But he does tell us:

- *the corruptness of this current message*

Though the message may have seemed innocent and innocuous, the teachers are causing chaos, Paul writes, and what they are doing is "trying to pervert the gospel of Christ" (v7). This is neither minor nor inoffensive, Paul warns,

- *the catastrophic consequences of spreading it*

Those speaking this message are under God's curse, Paul repeats (v8, 9). "Curse" is the same word as that used in the Old Testament for God's condemnation of unrepentant Canaan. The consequence of rejecting God's gospel message and teaching another could not be more severe – total judgment.

Paul concludes in v10 by linking back to v1. Just as his words are not spoken *from* men, with men as their origin, so they are not *for* men, as in designed primarily to please other human beings. Paul's sole motivation is the glory of God.

Here are a few questions you might want to use with your group...

1. Have you studied/been taught Galatians before? What do you remember of it? How has it helped you?
2. How can we be tempted to think that a book like Galatians may not be that relevant to us? Why is this a dangerous position to take?
3. How might it change how we think of the gospel, our faith, and our identities as Christians to think of the gospel as the story of God's rescue mission?
4. How can we help ourselves and how might it bless us to be quicker to think of ourselves as 'rescued people' over other identities we might have?
5. What do you think are some of the dominant 'gospel' narratives of our age/culture that we might be tempted to subscribe to?
6. Why is 'gospel *and*' such a temptation and yet such a danger? How does Scripture warn us against that? What (good, created) things are you tempted to place on a par with God?
7. How can we help each other to cling to God and his gospel?