

Life Application Notes

Galatians 1:1-10 - 14th February 2021

On Sunday, we started a new series where we're going to be taking a close look at Paul's letter to the Galatians. We're also going to break with the past in these study notes - rather than focussing on what the preacher said on Sunday, we're going to make these more of an independent study of the texts in question, allowing Life Groups to really engage with the unvarnished message of Scripture.

This week we're focussing on Galatians 1:1-10.

- **Read Gal 1:1-10 together**

We're going to tackle this passage in small, manageable chunks.

- **If you were going to split these verses into sections, how would you do it?**

There's not necessarily a single right answer to that question, but it is useful to consider the logical flow of Paul's rhetoric. What is he trying to achieve with each unit of text? I personally would have split this text into four sections, so that's how we're going to dig into the text in these notes:

1. vv. 1-5 - Formal introduction and greeting
2. vv. 6-7 - Paul admonishes the Galatians for abandoning the Gospel
3. vv. 8-9 - Paul pronounces a curse upon false teachers
4. v. 10 - Paul reiterates what drives him

Verses 1-5: So - let's start with the first section! Paul rarely wastes words needlessly, and everything he says in the first five verses of Galatians helps him to set up rhetorical dominoes which we'll see fall one-by-one throughout this letter. Let's think about the themes we're already starting to see, even though Paul's basically still just saying "hello".

- **Contrast this opening paragraph with those in 1 Cor 1:1, Phil 1:1, and Col 1:1. What stands out to you about the way Paul introduces himself in Gal 1:1-2?**
 - Key points to draw out include: 1) Paul is defending his authority as an apostle; 2) this isn't just his view, the letter is from "all the brothers" with him.
- **Now also contrast Gal 1:3-5 with 1 Cor 1:3, Phil 1:2, and Col 1:2. Why do you think Paul has gone into more detail in this letter?**
 - This letter is focussed on the importance of Jesus' sacrifice for us, and that *that and only that* is how we are to be delivered "from the present evil age". Packages do not deliver themselves!
 - The Gospel is God's plan (his will), and he will ultimately receive all the glory. It is not any man's gospel.

Verses 6-7: After his polite - if unusually protracted - greeting, Paul then changes gear completely and jumps straight into having a right go at the "foolish" Galatians (though he saves that particular insult for later).

- **What do you think are the core parts of Paul's message in vv. 6-7?**
 - One Gospel - and it's a subject on which we can permit no shades of grey.
 - Distortion == desertion.
 - Again - the Gospel is from God, not man (or, as we'll see in a second, angels).

Verses 8-9: Paul then goes on to say that any man or angel is accursed (even himself) if they proclaim any Gospel other than the (implied true) Gospel that Paul has previously preached to them.

So far we've not actually been told in what way they've deserted the Gospel - though we'll get to that in future weeks - but that gives us an opportunity to ask ourselves the general question:

- **Are there ways in which we have been / are tempted to distort the Gospel?**

Sometimes it's not easy to see - and it can be useful to have an outside voice speaking into our lives. In the days of the very Early Church, this was a role undertaken by Apostles, who had a particular calling from God to clarify, proclaim, and defend the Gospel.

- **How should we find that "outside voice" today?**
 - Scripture first, godly friends and teachers second. Both are important.

Verse 10: In verse 10, Paul begins to move into his more detailed argument for the authenticity of the Gospel he proclaimed (more on that next week) - but this last verse in the passage we're looking at this week serves two more functions.

- **What do you think these are?**
 - Suggests you cannot serve God and be driven by seeking to please men
 - Strongly implies that this is an area where he differs from the false teachers - they are trying to please men - Paul serves God. (Notice the "for" at the beginning of the verse, linking it backwards to vv. 8-9.)
- **Revisiting an earlier question, are we ever tempted to distort the Gospel to please others?**

Summary: Earlier we spoke about themes and rhetorical dominoes. Before we close today's study, let's think about how what we've read already sets up the rest of the book.

- **What things are you going to be looking out for, as we continue to explore this letter in the weeks ahead?**
 - The Gospel seems to be a core theme!
 - There's likely to be a fair bit of dealing with false teaching
 - Deliverance (which is something done to us, not by us) / Christ's sacrifice / grace

Context for leaders *Who were the Galatians, and what was Paul's relationship with them?*

There is some disagreement as to which churches this letter was written to. Galatia was a Roman province in what is now southern Turkey. It comprised a region of people who were ethnically Galatians (Gauls/Celts, migrated east), as well as a number of cities near the coast that were more Greco-Roman in culture. These southern cities were visited by Paul on his first missionary journey - and it now seems likely that these were the churches addressed in this letter, even if the people living there were not primarily Gallic. For much of Church history, it was assumed that this was written to those in the northern part of the province (likely caused by confusion arising after the southern cities were later absorbed into neighbouring provinces) - if that were the case, then Paul would have had to have established those churches much later. Consequently, who you think this letter was written to will also likely affect when you think it was written. The ESV Study Bible takes the view (as did Dave on Sunday) that this was written to the churches in the southern cities, and consequently dates it at A.D. 48, only a year or two after he would have established the churches in those cities.

In either case, the members of these churches would have been predominantly gentile. This is important because it appears to have left the very young believers particularly vulnerable to the false teachings from the Jewish teachers - as they would likely have sounded very authoritative, having had many more years of studying Scripture. That didn't stop them being wrong, of course! The gentiles, who had not been under the law of Moses before Christ, did not (according to Paul) need to start now.